LIVING ON THE FRONT LINE:
A SOCIAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF AGEING IN SOUTH WALES

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines, from a social anthropological perspective, the experience of old age and ageing in a South Wales locality. In comparison with the USA, there have been very few studies carried out on this subject among communities within the UK and much of what has been done has been orientated towards the particular needs of social policy.

This study does not set out to prove or disprove any of the sociological theories currently associated with the field of old age and ageing and its findings lay no claim to generality. Indeed, an important aspect of this study is that it is firmly rooted in the particular culture and locality specified, while continually drawing attention to similarities and differences with the experience of old people in other cultures.

Based on semi-structured and unstructured interviews with 62 old people, supplemented by participant observation in clubs and daycentres in this locality, it draws heavily on the life history approach and on oral history accounts. This approach proves to be particularly effective in illuminating the degree to which the personal life experience of an individual is interwoven with the historical/cultural experience of his/her local community.

This study examines the culture shared by the current generation of elderly people in this locality, past and present. It looks at the interaction between old people and their family, friends and neighbours, together with the wider community in general. It explores the perceptions and experiences of dependence, independence and interdependency, or reciprocity, in old age. Finally, it focuses on gender in old age, looking at masculinity and femininity as manifested in social roles, behaviour and relationships with others. In all these aspects, the voices of the old women and men who became my informants are heard throughout.

This thesis is entirely my own work except where otherwise indicated. No part of the thesis has been submitted for a degree in any other University.

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CHAPTER I

STUDYING OLD PEOPLE: METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH STRATEGY AND FIELDWORK TECHNIQUES

1.1 Aim and key concepts

This is a social anthropological study of the lives of elderly people today in a particular region of South Wales. It explores the social relationships of elderly people with respect to neighbours, friends, family and spouse. It examines the nature and extent of the connections of the elderly person to his or her community, and with members of that community. It asks the following questions: are the social networks that extend to and from each individual in society weaker and more attenuated in old age than in youth and middle age? And if some ties and associations have withered away altogether, which ones are most likely to remain? In particular, I wished to examine the help-giving and help-receiving relationships of elderly people; their feelings of dependence on or independence from these social relationships; their experience of loneliness and isolation; their behaviour and manner of conducting relationships, as old people, with key individuals - those who make up the "core" of their social networks (McAllister and Fischer,1978). Behaviour is also examined as shaped by views of gender, by the concepts of masculinity and femininity in old age, looking at the characteristics of old men and old women (as opposed to old people) and comparing and contrasting this with men and women at other points in the lifecycle. Again, it is particularly by means of an examination of the relationships old people have with others that these concepts are explored.

In so doing I wished to come one step nearer to an understanding of elderly people's experience of being old. I wanted to display it through their own eyes and from their own perspective. The importance of the community in which they were living, the relevance of the social background, is woven throughout the following account, which is largely written in the "ethnographic present". I did not set out to arrive at any general theories pertaining to "elderly people" in the abstract and divorced from this social background. I was conversant with the theories that have been propounded by researchers studying old age: disengagement (Cumming and Henry, 1961) deprivation (Harris, 1974), rolelessness (Rosow, 1976), deculturation (Anderson, 1972), subculture theory (Rose,1962), etc,[1] and of the attempts to arrive at general truths which apply to the elderly of any and every society (see Cowgill, 1972; Simmons, 1945; Press and McKool, 1972). Although interesting in themselves, and containing important ideas, they appeared strangely irrelevant to the lives I was observing, which were far too rich and complex to fit snugly into any formula.

Andrea Fontana (1971:179) has written about the drawbacks with general theories of ageing in a way that describes my sentiments very well:

> "To say that all old people wilfully disengage from society, or that all old people grasp onto the roles of their middle age is wishful thinking at best. Simple models in sociology possess a powerful attraction, but, unfortunately, simple models give no more than simplistic explanations."

Instead, I chose to study the social and familial networks of these people, and to focus on the concepts of dependence and independence in old age and on gender in old age. In choosing to explore these ideas, which are not part of one overriding theoretical concept, and which are simply significant dimensions of the experience of being old, I tried to make myself as open as possible to the whole experience. It can simplify matters

for the researcher, of course, to go into the field with one theory to prove or disprove, a way of filtering out all the rest, in its richness, incoherence and sheer volume.

Again, it might well be that one of the attractions of general theories is the opportunity they present the onlooker to keep the idea of old age and ageing at a comfortable arm's length, distancing it from their own lives by means of cosy abstractions. Eileen Fairhurst (1990:112) discovered this aspect of research on ageing while carrying out fieldwork in a geriatric unit. She wrote:

> "It is precisely because unpleasant aspects of doing research concerning elderly people, particularly those in hospital, are inextricably linked with the notion of personal experience, that arguably accounts, at least in part, for the relatively few ethnographies of old age."

Compare, for example, the distaste we feel when confronted with old age to the feelings of pleasure engendered by young people. Myerhoff (1978:19) noted this in her own study:

> "Most normal, relatively sensitive people identify naturally with children.... but in our culture today we do not have this same natural attentiveness to and empathy with the elderly... we don't want to recognize the inevitability of our own future decline and dependence."

Elias (1985:45) links this reluctance to consider old age with the corresponding reluctance to consider one's own death when he wrote that identification with the ageing and dying understandably poses special difficulties for people of other age groups.

As well as the social background, the personal life history of the elderly individual was also crucial to an understanding of that individual's life experience of old age. It is impossible and, indeed, meaningless to divorce old age from all the other life stages that have preceded it in the personal history of one individual.[2] Nor was I looking at ways

in which an individual was representative of other old people, but was perhaps even more interested in the ways in which he/she was unique.

1.2 Research Objectives

My research is intended to continue the recently built up tradition of social research on old age and ageing carried out abroad and within this country, especially that which utilises the life history methodology which came to be advocated from the late 1960s onwards and used in studies particularly notably in the 1980s. Notable recent research carried out in North America, which has influenced my own approach and which utilises this methodology included that carried out by Margaret Clark and Barbara Anderson (1967); also Barbara Myerhoff (1978); Helena Lopata (1972); Sarah Matthews (1979); Sharon Kaufman (1986). These studies share certain similarities in the sense that they are characterised by both a detachment and a sympathetic partiality. There is a detachment from their own culture (in which these studies are set) enabling them to penetrate its surfaces and identify with a critical eye the underlying values, pressures and ideals which confront the old person. At the same time there is a partiality to their subjects which leads to a deep and sensitive understanding of the individuals' experiences of old age. The studies share a social anthropological methodology, and moreover are infused with sympathy, knowledge of minute daily detail and an ethos of friendship, which bestow upon the accounts a living vividness inspiring to the reader. They have been capable, perhaps more than other researchers in this field, and as a direct result of the methodology they utilise, of transforming descriptions of old age from that of a

strange, frightening, somehow meaningless event that happens to "other people" to one which can be shared and understood by younger generations.

Specifically, Clark and Anderson looked at the modification and adaptation of values that must be undertaken by the old person if she/he is to age successfully- that is, in its most extreme form, without suffering mental illness. One such value is that of independence and self-reliancy and in old age they observed certain more contented and well-adjusted individuals in their study to have resolved the "conflict" between freedom and involvement "(Clark, 1972). Clark also declared it to be one of her aims in her work to build up an "anthropology of aging", which she saw as a neglected field. She takes an antithetical stance to the ideas of the Freudians who claimed that one's personality development virtually ceases with maturity and sees the development of the individual continuing into adult life and beyond. The crux of her and Anderson's research suggests that a person not only must learn how his culture defines the "proper" manner of growing up; he must learn the "proper" manner of growing old - and failures to perceive or conform to these cultural dicta may bring him into serious conflict with society (Clark and Anderson, 1967).

It was Barbara Myerhoff's methodology which particularly impressed me in her fieldwork among elderly people attending a Jewish daycentre in Miami (1978). She was particularly successful at showing old age "from inside the native's head" and her approach to her work is encapsulated in the following couple of extracts from her writing. The first illustrates her degree of Involvement with her subjects:

> "..I visited nearly all in their homes, took trips with them from time to time - to doctors, social workers, shopping, funerals, visiting their friends in old age homes and hospitals...." (p29).

In the second she acknowledges that this kind of research, in a sense, is a collaborative process between interviewer and interviewed:

> "I have included my own voice because it proved impossible to expunge. It seemed dishonest to exclude that, thereby giving an impression of greater objectivity and authority than I believed in.." (pp29/30).

Helena Lopata (1972) carried out a fascinating study of widowhood in old age comparing the experience of the North American widow with that of widows in other societies around the world. She looked at the choices open to the widow in American society, at the ambiguities surrounding her own and other people's expectations of her new role, and at the daily meaning of widowhood, placed firmly in a cross-cultural context.

Sarah Matthews looked at self-perceptions and the self-identity of old women from a symbolic interactionist perspective. She focused on old age as a stigma and examined her informants' methods of managing encounters with others who may assume that they are "just old women." She analysed the stratagems by which old women are able to maintain their self-identities as not-old. Underlying her research was the observation:

> "The old adage, "you are as young as you feel" may appear to the individual to be true only because the forces of the larger social structure are hidden" (1979:35).

Sharon Kaufman relied heavily on the life-history approach, looking at how individuals perceived some continuity over the course of their lives by means of life-themes. She declared that she intended:

> "to look at the meaning of aging to elderly people themselves, as it emerged in their personal reflections on growing old. This kind of inquiry

> requires the investigation of individual experience rather than the investigation of specific research variables. It requires looking at old people's accounts of the life-course, rather than employing theoretical concepts... to explain the nature of the aging process" (1986:5/6).

Many of these researchers have chosen to study old people within their own society and others have compared the ageing experience in other societies with that within their own. Moreover research which is not designed to be comparative but is concerned with elderly people in societies other than ones own will nevertheless implicitly illuminate the position of the elderly person in ones own culture. Studies by Malcolm Arth (1968) and Austin Shelton (1968), on the Igbo of northern Nigeria, and the work covered in the Amoss and Harrell volume (1981) on pre-industrial peoples of Africa, Latin America and Asia are included among the latter and many others have studied the elderly in societies other than that in which they themselves have membership.

Research carried out in this country has been outstanding in many instances, particularly in its monographs, exhibiting qualities of sensitive engagement with the subject matter together with a willingness on the part of the researcher to inject his/her own personality into both the research and the writing. However it has not been as prolific as that carried out in North America; it has indeed been pointed out that studies on this subject remain sparse, "sociology almost entirely neglects later life " (Arber and Ginn, 1991:18) and there are very few social anthropological works that focus exclusively on the experience of old age in any one culture. Indeed, it is true as already pointed out that until recently old age has tended to be under-researched in sociology unless it can make its way into some of the major concerns of social policy, such as poverty, social inequality, ill health and so on, by which means old age invariably comes to be seen as a "problem" (Fennell et al, 1986). The greatest influence on my work has been the very early work of Peter

Townsend (1957), at the Institute of Community Studies in Bethnal Green, whose approach was that of a sociologist/social anthropologist working in his own culture (although his findings were later utilised by social policy and indeed his arguments shaped public attitudes during the 1960s on how the needs of old people should be met, di Gregorio, 1986). Focusing on an impoverished area of east London, his work bore similarities to the work carried out also in east London by Willmott and Young (1960). Other interesting research has been carried out by Dorothy Jerrome (1981),on the social networks of middle-class elderly women; Marion Crawford (1973), on retirement ceremonies, seen in the classical anthropological sense, as rites of passage out of the world of work; Alan Walker (1982) and Chris Phillipson (1982), both of whom have concentrated on describing old age in this society from a political economy perspective,looking at how the structure of society and the nature of the economy have come to bear on the experience of old age. The most relevant of the British studies, to this present study, at least in terms of its geographical and cultural focus, is that carried out by Christopher Harris and Colin Rosser (1965). They undertook their fascinating study of kinship and social networks in Morriston, an area which is included in the present area of study.

My study concerns elderly people within Britain and in the wider sense I share this culture. However, having been brought up in Cardiff, their particular and local culture - that is, centred in South West Wales - is not something that I share, for in so many respects Cardiff culture is very different from that of the Valley regions of South West Wales. This has been beneficial to me in my fieldwork, helping me to "maintain naivete" (Bernard, 1988) as I learnt about the culture as a stranger.

It must be noted here that, while Cardiff is only about 40 miles away from the heart of the South-Western coalfield area, it can in many ways genuinely be viewed as a different cultural entity. It is not so much that it is urban - for Swansea and Neath and Port Talbot are all urban, while sharing much of the Valley culture as we will see in Chapter II - as that its people are keen to differentiate their way of life from that of their counterparts in the Valleys. Long derisively labelled as "English", Cardiff's inhabitants stand apart from those of the South Western coalfield by a number of subtle differences connected with manner of speech and accent, attitude to family and occupation (Cardiff has traditionally been strong in service rather than manufacturing industry) and so on. The antipathy towards the Valleys is expressed by Cardiffians as a form of snobbery - "she's from the Valleys, see, what do you expect?" is a typically contemptuous comment- and they are keen, in contrast, to emphasise their own sophistication. Even today, Valley people are seen as being old-fashioned, peasant-like, rude and ignorant, with the men possessing a reputation for brawling and drunkenness and the girls, who come down to Cardiff's pubs and clubs by bus on Saturday nights, possessing a reputation for loose and free ways.

1.3 Selecting the subjects for this study

While carrying out research for my doctoral dissertation I was working as a Research Assistant on a Welsh-Office/ Department of Health funded project looking at the issue of the viability of community care for frail old people in the Valleys. This latter was not a social anthropological study, but a monitoring and evaluating exercise aiming to assess quality of life and degree of physical dependency for each elderly individual involved in

the scheme, together with a number of individuals in a comparison and a control group respectively,over a period of three years. The elderly individuals involved in the scheme, who on the whole were physically frail and in the old-old age group, were being kept in their own homes, as opposed to going into residential care, by means of an initiative which provided home care that was both intensive and tailored to the needs of each individual - the Staying at Home Initiative (SAHI). SAHI was based in the Neath and Dulais Valleys, the Lliw Valley area and Morriston, an old post-industrial area of the city of Swansea, all in the County of West Glamorgan. There were approximately 50 individuals involved in SAHI in both areas, and 7,526 people aged 65+ receiving home care services,which constitutes approximately 10% of the total population of elderly people in West Glamorgan over 65. For the monitoring and evaluating exercise, the control and comparison groups respectively comprised a random selection of elderly individuals on mainstream home care in the above areas, those who were relatively healthy in other words, together with a random selection of individuals receiving intensive home care in the district of Port Talbot - those who, if the SAHI had existed in Port Talbot, would have been the most likely candidates for it.

Recounting these facts goes some way towards explaining how I found the elderly individuals who were to become my informants. While administering my structured questionnaire in the field, for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating, I struck up something of a rapport with a certain number of individuals who were particularly happy to talk about themselves and eager to answer my questions. In this manner individuals whom I encountered during my monitoring and evaluating exercise, and who may have been involved in any of the three groups described above, also became informants for

my own study. But it was not necessarily a matter of immediate openness and friendliness of character which engaged me with these individuals. Most of them were friendly in their manner, but others were reserved or even aloof. The characteristic they shared, however, was that of a greater or lesser willingness to talk about themselves.

At the same time, I was interested in broadening my base of study, wishing to avoid, if possible, the distortion that comes from relying on elderly informants that share the characteristic of spending most of their time in one place: their own homes. Past research into domiciliary services and initiatives has resulted in the development of an image of "the elderly person at home" (Bytheway, 1985). But what of the elderly people who are never at home to answer the door to a researcher? It was for this reason that I chose to visit four daycentres for elderly people in this area: one in Glynneath, one in Pontardawe, one on the Sandfields Estate, Port Talbot and one in the town of Neath. Furthermore, it was often the case that elderly people I had met through the SAHI or home care lists also attended one of these daycentres and were able to afford me a natural opening by introducing me to their friends in a "snowball" effect. The important thing was that I had my "patch", provided for me by my work as a Research Assistant, and with which I rapidly became well acquainted (the location and setting will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter II). Having been introduced to some of the region's elderly people through my monitoring and evaluating exercise, however, I was able to go on and meet people from many varied backgrounds and a variety of past and present circumstances. They make up, then, not a random sample, but a sample of a type which has aptly been described elsewhere as "fortuitous" (Harrison,1983).

1.4 My interview tool: the semi-structured questionnaire

The first thing to note is that my interview format was very flexible. It was composed of sections whose order could be adjusted spontaneously depending on the characteristics of the individual, the feel of the interview, the aptness of the situation. Sections could be shortened as appropriate or omitted entirely if they threatened to be irrelevant to the particular respondent. Some questions were initially inspired by questions posed by Sarah Matthews (1979),(eg "Do you remember having any ideas about what it would be like to be over 70 when you were younger?") and Clark and Anderson (1967) (eg,"What have been the two hardest things you've had to face since you were 60?") in their own fieldwork, but they were modified and adapted in my format and developed and took on lives of their own in the course of the study.

The question:"would you describe yourself as old/middle-aged/young?" which also appeared in my questionnaire was not my own invention but can be considered something of a standard in examining the issue of age-identification.

Interview headings

The sections of my interview format were organised under the following headings, and seemed to bloom into life naturally, later sections being augmented to the main stem as a development over time, like buds on a plant. Broadly speaking questions were designed to explore:

Family connections: these included questions on relationships with children (sons and daughters considered separately), grandchildren, siblings, and the wider family, together with the experience of intergenerational living arrangements;

Friends and neighbours:relationships with the latter,past and present, including social events shared, helping dimensions to the relationships, the way in which they had changed in quality and meaning over the years;

Work: including the nature of their employment in younger days, aspects of the working day and the part the spouse played in its smooth running;

Marital relationship: including present compared with past, interactions inside and outside of the domestic environment;

Loneliness and isolation: including occasions which precipitate these feelings and methods and beliefs which help with coping with them;

Retirement: for men, their wives and working women: how it affected their self-perceptions, marital relationship and social involvement;

Bereavement: including widowhood and death of close family members (especially mother/spouse) and the significance of these events to the individual's experience of old age;

Independence: focusing on perceptions of independence in past and present terms, personal definitions and meanings;

Helping relationships: looking at reciprocal and non-reciprocal relationships found among friends, family, spouses and the significance such interactions wield;

Attitudes towards contemporary society: including elderly people's perceptions of the way in which society differs today from the way it was during their youth and middle-age, in terms of values, beliefs, employment, features of the neighbourhood, reflected both by observation and by experiences of the elderly person in the wider society, eg through talking to people in the street, going to shops and so on;

Social history: local society as they experienced it; oral history and anecdotal tales, the workings of history as seen through the lives of individuals;

The character of the locality: their impressions of the character of the area, as compared to other localities in their knowledge or belief;

Self-image: including self-esteem and self-judgment with regard to outward appearance, perceptions of oneself as "old" or "not old", as masculine or feminine, and generally in connection with disability and infirmity, dependence and independence and the daily management of "old age".

Generally, there were certain key questions adhered to on each topic: otherwise, what was important was the subject area itself and methods of eliciting information concerning each topic varied according to the information already possessed about the individual's life. The interview format was very far, then, from resembling a questionnaire in its structure, and as well as being fluid and adaptable,the interview format was constantly modified and updated as some paths of questioning proved to be blind alleys and others proved so fruitful they became in need of further development and enrichment. One sub-section, for instance, contrasting expectations of retirement with the actuality of the experience, soon became irrelevant to the kinds of issues I was focusing on in my study, a sort of backwater to the flow the fieldwork was beginning to follow and was dropped, while the section on attitudes towards death and dying proved to be far less insightful to my study than I had originally anticipated and was soon considerably pared down. In fact, it had started to become less useful in illuminating the experience of ageing and old age itself and had taken on a character all of its own, which, while interesting, possessed less relevance it seemed to me to the present study. By contrast, questions on the social

history of the area and on opinions of modern society were added almost halfway into the fieldwork, as it became clear to me that a textbook knowledge of local history was not nearly enough for my purposes; people talking about local history revealed much about themselves. In addition, I tried out different methods of eliciting answers to the same basic questions during repeat visits to the same individuals. For example, on my second and third repeat visits to individuals I used Antonucci and Akiyama's method (1987) for discovering social contacts and their meanings and adapted questions from Fischer's work on social networks (1977), respectively, in order to introduce new prompts and a freshness into my questioning.

Each interview lasted between three quarters of an hour and two hours, and was tape recorded and later transcribed by me. Some individuals were interviewed only once but others were interviewed three, four or five times and the latter can be said to have become "key informants" in a sense in that I learnt a considerable amount from these "insiders" about the experience of old age. Tremblay (1957:688) has provided a useful definition of the term "key informant". He writes:

> "...a few informants are interviewed with the aim of securing the total patterning of a culture. The technique is pre-eminently suited to the gathering of the kinds of qualitative and descriptive data that are difficult or time-consuming to unearth through structured data gathering techniques such as questionnaire surveys."

The tape recorder did not serve as an impediment, as I had feared at the outset, but was revealed as a positive factor in the interviewing. Elderly people appeared to enjoy the idea of having their lives recorded for "posterity" - posterity, of course, being a term that is a lot less abstract for older, as compared to younger, people. A tape recorder appeared to give authenticity and added a weight and importance to what they were

saying which some appeared to relish. Although I explained that we should forget about the presence of the tape recorder and leave the microphone unattended on the table where it would do its job, several insisted on holding the microphone and speaking into it with obvious enjoyment. Combined with the tape recording, the idea that I intended to write a "book" based on their "lives" both pleased and impressed my informants, encouraging the idea that they were taking part in a worthwhile venture, and thus helped to maintain their interest and enthusiasm.

The timing of repeat interviews was something I quickly learned to judge. Too closely spaced and it proved nonconstructive - a weekly basis, for instance, produced nothing new and was most likely to become a purely chatty, gossipy affair, while a four to six month gap was the most fruitful, in the sense of generating fresh responses to old questions and allowing me to have gathered a few new insights from the last round of interviewing. It was also the most comfortable for me personally in that I was most keen to prevent the process from being exploitative. In between, especially friendly and informative individuals were often dropped in on or spoken to on the telephone. Interesting occurrences were produced by second visits: some old people didn't recall my face but spoke about "another girl" who had come round and one even told me that "she" had written him a nice letter telling him how she had passed her exams and become a Doctor. He finished by saying "I hope you pass your exams too." Another remembered me so vividly that even though a year had passed she could tell me (accurately) that I had lost weight and my hair had grown longer. Sometimes, developments had occurred in the life of an elderly person during the interval between repeat interviews which proved highly interesting. For example, by the time of our second interview one

particular elderly woman was no longer living alone but was sharing her home with her 46-year old daughter following the breakdown of the latter's marriage. The relationship between mother and daughter had not been particularly strong up until this time - Marlene had moved out of her parents' home at the age of 14, electing instead to live with an aunt. So this was a very interesting time in the lives of both elderly mother and middle-aged daughter. The change in circumstances had affected relationships with other family members - most notably the grandchildren. At the time I interviewed her, Christmas was approaching and she was wondering what changes this event would bring.

Place of interview

The interviews were carried out either in the elderly person's own home or in a private room or at a secluded table at a daycentre. Interviews were mostly one-to-one, although it proved impossible to avoid the presence of a third party in 15% of cases. There is no doubt that one-to-one interviewing was the best method of approaching such personal, reminiscent, emotionally-charged subject matter.

Sometimes it was beneficial if, having begun with my Research Assistant questionnaire[3], I then moved onto my own interview. This allowed time to move gradually towards questions of a more personal and intimate nature. This tactic also capitalised on the "openness" brought about by the first interview, allowing the old person finally to indulge the desire to express their opinions where the questionnaire, while whetting their appetites, had yet not permitted them such an opportunity. At last a strict yes/no response, as required by my "home care" survey could be abandoned in favour of long, contemplative responses. But this procedure was strictly for the elderly person who

possessed stamina, the necessary free time, as well as enthusiasm. Most frequently, the necessary action was to arrange an appointment to return with my questions(this obviously did not apply to the individuals met at the day centres.)

As described earlier, the life-history method featured prominently in my interviewing, a method which is sometimes known as the biographical interview. This is an approach that is particularly suited to interviewing elderly people. Barbara Myerhoff and Andrei Simic (1978:21) suggest two reasons why this is so:

> "First, the extended personal history of the elderly makes a historical approach especially apt, for the elderly are often engaged actively in interpreting and reviewing their lives... Second... when aging is regarded as a cumulative process we can only understand this movement by attending to the history of an individual's life..." [4]

Again, elderly people particularly enjoy the conversational nature of its style with its lack of formality and a non-hierarchical approach that does not rigidly categorise the two participants into the roles of subject and object. It has been said that

> "a biographical interview combines aspects of a research interview, a clinical interview and a conversation between friends" (Levinson et al, 1978:15).

It has been rightfully pointed out (di Gregorio, 1986) that research on old age mostly concentrates on gathering statistics which describe measurable features of old people's lives - their income, the type of housing in which they live, their social contacts, etc. In contrast, the life history method is a holistic approach:

> "It contextualises the older person's life today with the life and circumstances that came before it.. Above all, it conveys the richness and depth of a life - it adds flesh to a study while the aims of more conventional sociology necessitate laying bare the bones for analysis" (di Gregorio, 1986:13).

1.5 Interviewee profile

I interviewed 62 people in all, at least twice and occasionally numerous times each over a period of three years, of which 19 were male, representing approximately 31%, and 43 female, representing approximately 69%.

Approximately one-third of the respondents came from the Neath and Dulais Valleys, one-third from the Swansea Valley with the remaining third being divided between Port Talbot and the Afan Valley (especially Cwmavon), Morriston and Neath town. They lived in a variety of residences - terraced miners' houses, large middle-class houses with gardens, large 1930s council houses, some unmodernised but most modernised. Most had left school at 14, noone had a University education, though one woman had attended teachers' training college and another had gone through secretarial college.

They were mostly widowed (71%) although four had never been married and around a fifth had spouses still living. A small number were acting as carer to spouse or sibling at the time (in the sense of such an individual being chair or bedbound and requiring aid with most basic activities); and about the same number were themselves being cared for by a close family member.

Approximately two-thirds of the group attended daycentres and one-tenth attended clubs of various kinds.

Birthplace

The great majority of these respondents had been born within ten miles of their current place of residence, but 12% of people had originated elsewhere, of which three had come from another Valley, three had come from England, one in youth, one in his 30s, one in retirement. Two were native to the area in which the interviewing was carried out but had lived elsewhere at some point in their lives. Almost three quarters of the elderly people attended daycentres and/or clubs, with 13% chairbound or housebound and unable to leave the house altogether. Eight individuals were receiving intensive home care, owing to physical frailty, representing 13% of the total.

Family

In terms of family, twelve individuals, approximating to 19% of the whole were childless and thirty-five women currently lived alone, with five living with family, of which four lived with daughters and one with a son. Only one woman said she would consider remarriage although more than half reported feeling lonely, and this was regardless of whether or not they were grandparents. In fact, almost three-quarters of the old people were grandparents.

Work

The nature of the occupations pursued in earlier life by my respondents is as follows: nineteen men, including both those taking part in the study as well as the husbands or late husbands of my female informants, had been colliers; six had been steelworkers and six tin workers at some point in their lives. That is, out of the men connected with this study, either through their wives or else having a direct involvement themselves, 40%

had been colliers and 13% steel or tin workers respectively. 11% had been both steel and tin workers at some point in their lives. About one-third of the women had worked outside the home at some point in their lives, usually giving this up on marriage. The places they had worked in tended to be shops, factories or the catering trade. Six of my informants could be described as belonging to the professional class or as having a husband who had belonged to this class. However the professional men had not been born into this class but had worked their way up through the firms, two doing mining exams, one accountancy exams, one was a vicar and one female informant was a schoolteacher.

Age

The average age of the respondents was 77 years with the age span as follows:13% in their 60s;32% in their 70s;50% in their 80s and 5% in their 90s.

Although the old people shared many similar characteristics, none of the above characteristics can actually indicate the great variety of individual experiences found among the group. For example, the group included never-marrieds, marrieds with no children, right through to marrieds with copious numbers of great grandchildren. Some had remarried twice, some had been widowed a long time - up to forty years. Others had recently lost their spouses. Again, there were all types of personalities represented, although most of them were very interested in talking to me, which might make the sample unrepresentative in the first place. In other words, they were unique and yet typical. Cornwell (1984:1) describes the twenty-four individuals in her study as

> "not "typical" or "representative" in the statistical sense, because they were not randomly selected, but "typical" in the colloquial meaning of the word"

and indeed I feel much the same can be said about the individuals in this present study.

1.6 Interviewee appearance

This section is not meant to be whimsical or anecdotal but is included out of a conviction that acknowledging appearance and image and the meanings they convey in each case is crucial to the process of understanding the individual in his/her environment. Appearance can both obscure and illuminate at one and the same time, but whether outward appearance is intended to disguise, to hide or to enhance, it remains a key method and entry point to an understanding of the self-conception of the actors in a study and may tell us something about their lives.

Thus, I observed with keen interest the appearance of my elderly respondents. Several women I interviewed in their own homes continued to wear aprons over their dresses even though they were not obviously involved in the act of cleaning. One wheelchair-bound woman of 90 told me that in beginning her day the first thing she did was "put a clean apron before me". Later in the interviews it transpired that the housewife role was particularly important to them and featured prominently in their self-definitions. The connection between the wearing of the apron and their holding such a view of themselves was thus made evident.

Lil's appearance presented something of a contrast with her self-image in other respects; dressed in her smartest outfit to go to the daycentre - an elegant blue evening dress, with lacy ruffles at the sleeves and neck and a brooch pinned to the collar - she talked

nevertheless about the deep sense of shame she felt connected with her being in a wheelchair, the way it caused her to hide from people who had known her when she was able to walk.

Sometimes the manner in which an individual dressed afforded a sudden, unexpected insight into the very heart of their private world. Edna, for example, who suffered from poor eyesight, changed for our appointment out of the gardening things she had been wearing earlier in the day and into a smart outfit - black silky trousers, a white blouse with a pussycat bow, a long slimline black cardigan. Later on, as she was seeing me out of her cottage gate in the bright sunshine, I noticed that her clothes were in fact dusty and old, the trousers snagged, the cardigan stuck all over with little furry burrs. It was interesting to consider that I had been able to see things, for a short time, from her perspective, freakishly owing to the thick gloom inside her cottage. This attempt to see things through the eyes of my informants became relatively easy before long. Thus, it was a shock for me, answering the doorbell in Olive's house, to be confronted by someone asking for "an old lady". Surely he couldn't mean Olive? Perhaps indeed the way Edna saw herself had not changed very much with old age because in fact Edna did not "see" herself in the way younger people, with their sharper eyesight, would have done.

At other times appearances obscure, present a barrier between you and the other, almost forcing you to remain "outside". I recall, in a daycentre, an image of a heavily overweight elderly woman whose bare legs on a winter's day were swollen and criss-crossed with strident veins, sucking heartily on a cigarette. Another image is of an old woman with very thin varicose-veined legs wearing a pair of very high stiletto heels. Such images - so

alienating in their shocking unexpectedness - almost served to mock me, whenever I felt I was making some progress in absorbing myself in another's perception of the world and leaving behind my own outsider's viewpoint; in particular that viewpoint associated with a young person interviewing one who is old.

1.7 Elderly people in the setting of their own homes

The houses in which the elderly people were living were drab and grey bricked on the outside, presenting a particularly gloomy picture on rainy days; inside they were roomier than one might have expected, cosy near the fire but cold and draughty in rooms where no coal fire had been lit. The typical valley house possesses a large, chilly parlour, seldom if ever used, with a glass-fronted cabinet displaying boxing trophies, medals and photographs. Passing this room on the right via the narrow hall way one goes down some steps into a snug, dark, back room, complete with blazing coal fire. It is in front of this coal fire that the elderly person spends most of his/her time, in an ancient, scruffy, misshapen armchair covered with a square of hand-crocheted blanket. Increasingly these days the room contains a bed too as the old person can no longer tackle the steep flight of stairs that begin immediately behind the front door. It is both the presence of the bed in the sitting room, together with the frequent unmodernised appearance of furniture and fittings, that distinguishes most clearly the house of the old person from that of her/his younger neighbour next door.

There are variations on this theme according to means and taste: Vera had a grime encrusted portable TV and huge pieces of lumpy furniture that took up most of the

available room; Edna's kitchen had two pails filled with water from the pump as her cottage had never been fixed up with running water; Olive's two-ringed camping stove served to cook the things that could not be placed in the hob beside the fireplace; the absence of a washing machine was also a near-universal feature.

The few elderly individuals from the professional classes lived in larger houses, very often detached, with large gardens running down perhaps to a park or wooded area at the back. All too often the elderly person, alone in the house for the first time, appeared very small and a little lost, in a house far too big for him/her, with maybe only three rooms out of an existing eight still in use.

It was not always easy to get to the elderly person's home in the first place. The process of locating it was often quite a tricky one as many homes were situated in isolated hamlets or totally off the detailed local maps which had been kindly provided for me by Morriston Central Control, and primarily intended for the use of their Home Care Assistants.

Summertime was obviously the most favourable season for my interviewing and in the winter months of 1990-91 and 1991-2 I was beset with all the usual problems of flooded roads, ice and the shortened days which made things difficult on two counts. Firstly, for finding my way across unlit valley roads and secondly because of the fact that elderly people are wary of opening their doors in the darkness. As Mary explained,

> "the people around there know that if I were on my own that I won't answer the door, if it's dark.. Unless you was to come now and you shout like and tell me who you was. I'd answer the door then."

Even when I had been able to arrange my appointment in advance timidity and anxiety on the part of the old person meant that often it was only after my second or third ring on the bell that the door would be gingerly opened to me. One elderly woman said to me, when I arrived for our appointment,

> "My friend said I was very trusting to tell you to come. When I told my friend about you she said "How do you know she's not going to bring gangsters with her?" I never thought about that,"

she added. She appeared visibly relieved when I reassured her that I had no intention of robbing her or attacking her.

The snow that fell in January 1991 presented me with further decisions to weigh up: what would the roads be like in Pontardawe? Would the hill in Ystalyfera with its hairpin bend be negotiable or not? Was it foolish to try or unnecessarily cowardly not to do so? The desire for safety and the temptation to be an intrepid fieldworker often waged war, influenced, no doubt, by my enjoyment of early anthropological monologues set in West Africa.

But when I arrived at my destination the interviews I was able to carry out in providing me with a wealth of information about the "culture of the old" justified the difficulties I had negotiated. Although the adjective "old" carries negative implications, not all old people are ill/slow/decrepit and people in their 80s and 90s can possess senses and minds which are unimpaired, quick and alert as much as people in their 40s and 50s. Leslie, for example, aged 84, was slim, athletic - walking a mile each day and swimming regularly - thoughtful of speech and without any trace of slowness about him, reading without the need to use glasses and hearing without difficulty.[5]

"Old people", again, is an expression which seems to lump people of a certain age together, in a sort of uniform, grey mass as if the very process of growing old were enough to dissolve away all the former differences between them (see Elder, 1977). But observed at first hand this is a mistake one could not make because each individual of course was wholly unique and as different one from another as they had been in their youth. This is predictable, according to the explanations offered by life-span developmental psychology (see Erikson, 1982). As Bond, Briggs and Coleman interpret it,

> "The courses of development of different people are likely to diverge the longer they live, and the more experiences they absorb. Rather than growing more alike as we age, we therefore become more individual" (1990:27/8).

There was Daro, the hard-drinking retired collier, who was glad to retire at an earlier than average age because, as he said, his drinking in the night was making it hard for him to work in the day; and very different from this was Stan, a diligent self-educated colliery manager who had been presented with a gold watch upon retirement and who still, at the age of 81, kept up an interest in mining engineering.

Katie had been married twice but was not prepared to risk it a third time because, as she said, men were so deceiving; further down the road Phyllis had waited years for her Percy, only for him to die one day after they had taken out the banns.

Ethel would never have considered remarriage, she said, because she loved her husband and never allowed him to touch the housework at all; Emily, on the other hand, had received fierce beatings from her husband all her life, at one time while she was

pregnant with one of their seven children, and now, in her widowhood, felt that she was experiencing the best time in her life.

Daniel John had been persuaded by his wife to retire early, so they could spend more time together,but his wife died two months before his retirement date and he found himself experiencing retirement alone; Ivy, on the other hand, became a widow in her young middle-age and transformed her life by taking on a career and doing all the things - travel, photography- which she would never have been able to do had her husband not died so young.

1.8 The process of interviewing

There are many stereotypical expectations held of elderly people and I saw it as an important aspect of my role as an interviewer to keep my mind as free from these expectations as possible. Stereotyped views of elderly people uncovered in various studies and summarised by Donald McTavish (1971) include views that old people are generally ill, tired, not sexually interested, mentally slower, forgetful and less able to learn new things, grouchy, withdrawn, feeling sorry for themselves, less likely to participate in activities (except, perhaps, religion), isolated, in the least happy or fortunate time of life,unproductive and defensive. The most dangerous dimension attached to holding such perceptions of elderly people is that they may affect an older person's views of her/himself, causing them to behave as the stereotype would suggest. Consequently it would not be surprising if an interviewer who went to such an interview with an elderly person possessing these ideas found his beliefs confirmed. However much researchers

may view elderly people as "cultureless" or as occupying a sub-culture outside of the mainstream of society, I did not assume it would be beneficial to look on an elderly person as "the other" during the process of collecting information. Nor is it possible to say that my approach was purely "grounded"[6], in the sense that any of my theoretical ideas were strictly generated from the data itself, however, as I was aware of such theories while I was collecting my data and could not have wiped them from my mind entirely. The point I am trying to make is that my intention was to come to the data as fresh and open-minded as possible, with no axe to grind, and with a sense of the uniqueness of this field experience.

Indeed, I saw the process of interviewing as a two-way current, an interactive exchange of ideas which involved two individuals in close collaboration. For me, this was the only way of truly engaging with the experiences and perceptions of the elderly person and attempting to understand the business of being old from the inside. It was not necessary for the individual to get into my skin as well, but it was important for him/her to get some feeling about the kind of person I am. There was no doubt that, with some individuals more than others, this increased their involvement in the interview process, encouraging them to share their confidences, tempting them into opening up. The interviewer can have a positive, stimulating effect on the life of a respondent: Phyllis was one who "definitely brightened up" with my visits, according to her sister. Phyllis said to me, with some excitement, "Next time you come, I'll go to the hairdressers and I'll put makeup on." The next time I arrived on her doorstep, she said to her sister:

"Here's our friend." And to me: "I was just thinking about you this morning and wondering when you would come to see us again."

My own characteristics as an interviewer: female, single, aged 25-26, were thus important and should indeed be noted. The fact is that my elderly respondents did indeed react to these characteristics, especially to the fact of my being young. Sometimes this produced a positive effect. My youth meant that there was a sense of great distance separating my own experience from theirs. This usually worked to encourage and reassure. Where there was such a vast distance, there was no sense of one individual judging the other. The change in mores and behaviour over the last 60 years further seemed to guarantee this. With a younger person, there is often the temptation to instruct by way of example. Several married or widowed people - especially men - were eager to counsel me to play the field and not to get "tied down" to any one man. Elderly women asked me about my own life and circumstances and there was a certain sense of excitement as they listened and recalled their own youths and often identified themselves with me. Many were ready with interested questions about my life which followed up things I had told them previously.

Interestingly, my youth combined with my status of outsider - a double distance - rendered certain delicate subjects that much easier to approach. Eliciting attitudes towards death and dying, for example, did not prove as problematic as I had anticipated. The very fact that this subject is something of a taboo in ordinary conversation among acquaintances seemed to produce the result that elderly people were extremely willing to discuss the matter with an interested outsider. It transpired that close family members had eluded their previous efforts to discuss death and dying except, still reluctantly, in the strictest formality -who will concern themselves with the funeral arrangements, and so on. In one instance, one elderly woman explained that even the vicar had fought shy

of discussing the matter with her. Much pent up feeling, ideas and thoughts were consequently released by my questioning.

However, my age did not always work in my favour. One 83 year-old woman, on discovering that I was unmarried and childless refused at first to allow me to interview her. "How could you understand anything?" she said. "How could you possible understand about life if you haven't been through these things?"

I assured her that although my life was very different from hers, nevertheless I had close relationships with women who had passed through these life events, and at the same time I kept an open, interested mind when it came to the experiences of others. In the end, she grudgingly consented to talk to me.

The point is that as an interviewer and an individual I was most certainly a factor in the final outcome and the results I produced, the rapport I struck up, the anecdotes that were told to me, were partly a reflection of this factor. Indeed the questions I was asked - my advice, my opinion - could be equally as insightful as the replies that were given to my own questions. Phyllis, for example, was anxious to discover whether I thought her mental faculties were declining over the course of the regular visits I paid her. When I commented on how well she was looking she clutched my arm and demanded to know "How about me mentally? Do you see any signs of me being a bit funny "up there"?"

In the context of her personal history, this was a very natural fear for her to have developed: she had nursed her brother with Alzheimer's Disease for five years before he died.

Among other researchers, Ann Oakley is notable in having embraced the interactive approach to interviewing as opposed to the textbook version of the interview which "appeals to such values as objectivity, detachment, hierarchy and "science" (Oakley, 1981:38) She describes this as an essentially masculine approach which contrasts with an essentially intuitive, responsive, non-hierarchical feminine model. She concludes:

> "It becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship"(p41).

Subsequently other female researchers have enthusiastically embraced Ann Oakley's approach. Janet Finch (1993) considers it particularly apposite to the situation of female researchers interviewing female respondents. She writes:

> "...in the setting of the interviewee's own home, an interview conducted in an informal way by another woman can easily take on the character of an intimate conversation..." (p168/9).

Maria Mies (1993) too talks of:

> "The postulate of value free research", of neutrality and indifference towards the research objects, has to be replaced by conscious partiality, which is achieved through partial identification with research objects" (p68).

Researchers in the field of ageing have identified this approach as particularly useful in the interviewing of elderly people. Gerald Hoinville (1977), in his guide to research techniques, has described how the conflict between the interviewer's role as an automaton who will not influence respondents' answers, and her role in motivating,

explaining and encouraging, is particularly exaggerated among interviews with elderly people.

This approach has been called "passionate neutrality" (Hedges, 1988) and Rosalie Wax (1952) recommends reciprocity as a productive field technique, whether it be the exchange of information for information or the exchange of information for the opportunity to relieve loneliness or the tedium of daily life. I found myself slipping into this technique on several occasions; for example, Jack wanted very much to make me a cup of coffee - he claimed he was famous for his excellent coffee - and I said I would be delighted - after he had answered my questions.

Responses to me were very mixed. There was some interest and pleasure, as well as a certain though rare amount of hostility towards the nature of my questions - and indeed I cannot blame them for that. Sometimes, the thought of asking such searching questions to strangers filled me with trepidation. What effect would I have on people, dredging through the past as I did, alighting on disturbing memories? Some old people were heard encouraging their friends to "have a go", and be interviewed by me; others, overhearing snatches of our dialogue, were heard to say they thought it a damn cheek, the kinds of questions I was asking. Others, while very happy to discuss the intricacies of their life with me, were nevertheless nervous and self-conscious: Agnes toyed agitatedly with the handles of her handbag, Katie twisted a tissue round and round her index finger as we talked.

Not only was I young but I was also female and this is an important factor too, as important in my "relationship" with my interviewees as the fact of my age. Being a woman was probably a factor in my favour because I think it is true that in general women can seem less threatening and intimidating, less official and generally serious in this context than might men. We are, after all, still to some degree expected to confine our interest to the personal or social, rather than the political or official and this is particularly true for the generation who are old. This made it easier for informants to relax, tell confidences, jokes, gossip, all of which I encouraged. I discussed makeup, hairdos, boyfriends and the pros and cons of having children with various of my female respondents, which sometimes gave the interview the pleasant feel of "collusion" between us. Many grandmothers maintained particularly strong and satisfying relationships with their grand daughters and their looking upon me very much in a grandmotherly manner did no harm at all to the process of coaxing their confidences[7]. With elderly men too my being female was no disadvantage as the men of this region and this generation exhibit a deference to and liking for women. Being a woman, and a woman who is listening rather than talking, may also have explained why several among my regular informants seemed to look upon me as some kind of compassionate, healing stranger.[8] They wanted to discuss their ailments in depth with me, to show me their infirmities and be reassured and nurtured. Phyllis, for example, not content with demonstrating to me how she was unable to fasten her skirt owing to a hiatus hernia insisted that I feel her hernia. Jack shocked me at first by pushing up his trouser leg while we were talking and rubbing the stump of his amputated leg, but I quickly got used to it, and was not surprised when one day he asked me to rub it for him as it was aching and that day the arthritis in his hands was also playing up.

I was very happy to strike up a rapport with any particular informant, no matter what unorthodox method it took. At the start of my interviewing them many people - almost exclusively women - had doubted their own usefulness as informants for my research. They claimed their lives had been boring and uneventful, they said they had really done very little at all and doubted that anyone would possibly find them interesting. This particularly applied to women[9]. Others doubted the level of their own education and abilities to discuss things in the way I "wanted to hear". Olive felt the need to inform me, before one session, "I'm getting very slow and my spelling's gone to pot." Adding, "I think if you don't practise you get behind." Building up a rapport with them and encouraging them to chat freely usually encouraged the shedding of such inhibitions.

However, I was not always so successful in the business of rapport-building as I would have hoped. Some people remained restrained, terse and very reluctant to open up and possibly in them this would have been a lifelong trait. Others, while friendly and voluble, wanted to answer their own questions, not mine. Minnie, from Cwmavon, was a retired headmistress, articulate and intelligent, but she did not answer my questions without putting up a fight, because she had many matters of greater interest to her of which she wished to unburden herself regardless of my wishes. Similarly Jack was more interested in finding a Tom Jones tape that he'd tried unsuccessfully to find last time I visited him than he was in answering my carefully planned questions.

As I have mentioned previously, other interviewees fostered suspicions about my capability for understanding or appreciating their past histories, owing to my age and position in the lifecycle. Others, while very friendly and well meaning, still occasionally

experienced the same sort of doubt regarding communicating with me, and it is not unlikely that this acted as a barrier at times. Some worried that I was "English" and wouldn't be able to understand the Welsh way of life; Elsie, when telling me of the way her life had changed in old age following the onset of ill health, sighed with exasperation and said repeatedly, "You have no idea what it's like." At such moments I got the impression that my informant drew back from me, covering over the transparency of view which I had until that point been enjoying.

I have made previous reference to the fact that interviewing in the presence of a third party could often not be avoided, especially with old people who may spend most of their day with their spouse, or who may be in a caring relationship with another. In the case of married people, their spouse was often present if the interview took place in their own home. In other cases, I might chance to call round on an elderly woman when her ubiquitous friend-and-neighbour had just popped in. She would not want her friend to go, even if the friend offered to do so, sometimes out of politeness and a desire not to appear to exclude her, at other times because she looked to her friend as a source of support and backing in what, for some, was a very scary business. During one visit, an elderly woman insisted that her friend stayed because "she knows me better than I know myself." In some ways, indeed, that may well be true: Ethel's friend, in knowing her for so many years, ensured that Ethel's old identity - for example as a young married woman - is preserved. Outsiders, on the contrary, may see Ethel simply as she is now, namely an old widow. It is then that her friend plays the important function of preserving some continuity of identity for Ethel, keeping alive the other dimensions of her identity. It is

difficult to gauge exactly what effect the presence of a third party had on any one interview.

Previous research has indicated that it is probably slight, but that slight effect is more likely to be negative from the point of view of the researcher than positive, tending to inhibit the natural response of the interviewee. In general, indeed, I observed that an interview was rendered less "sensitive", the informant tending to put on a brave face in front of spouse or friend and responses were likely to be much less emotional, hidden in the jokes and anecdotes which characterised playing to the gallery. I too was less comfortable in posing my questions, aware of the scrutiny of an uninvolved other. In a husband-wife situation the wife was invariably the one most affected and influenced by the presence of her husband. It was she was looked to him to say: "Well, what do you think?" before replying to a question, or, if she did reply out of her own volition, then she would steal a nervous glance at him afterwards to judge his response. However, the husband appeared a lot less affected by the presence of his wife. For example when I posed the question: "Do you ever feel lonely?" to Mr and Mrs J-:

"Well no," she replied, as if it were expected of her so to respond. "Not with Dai here, of course;" "Yes often" he replied, however:

> "I stand at the window and I watch the people going by in the street and I feel terribly lonely."

The only occasion on which I observed the wife's replies to be relatively unaffected by the presence of her husband was in the case of Mr and Mrs R-, where Mr R- was bedbound and Mrs R- his full-time carer. In this case, it was Mr R- who was subdued and Mrs R- who answered my questions boldly and with confidence, indicating that

indeed the question of third-party influence on any interview is closely connected to matters of power and dependency.

1.9 How the business of interviewing elderly people may have differed from interviewing other people

1.9.1 Communication

The first important point to note is that the process of communicating with an elderly person was often complicated by physiological problems associated with old age. One of the most frequent problems was deafness which often occasioned talking at a heightened pitch for an amount of time which rendered me physically exhausted. In some cases, deafness proved too profound even for shouting, forcing the prospective interview to be abandoned.

Robert Butler has explained the difficulties elderly people suffer as the result of hearing loss from the point of view of medicine. Communication problems with others can lead to suspiciousness and even paranoia on the part of the old person. A relationship probably exists between hearing loss and depression. He maintains that hearing loss causes greater social isolation even than blindness. Onlookers may mistake the hard-of-hearing as mentally abnormal or "senile" and there is little social sympathy (see Butler and Lewis, 1977).

One elderly woman recognised her deafness as an impediment in mixing with younger people. "I'm hard of hearing so I can't keep up with them" she said, referring to the reasons why she kept to her own age group.

The reliability of old people's memories has also been questioned (for example, Rogers and Herzog,1987) when they often get factual information, as easy to verify as their own dates of birth, quite wrong. But this affected my research very little. My questions were invariably directed towards discovering the subjective experience of various aspects and events of their lives; it was aimed at uncovering feelings not facts. For example, under the topic "bereavement" I asked the elderly person to describe his or her experience of the death of a spouse - how did they feel? how did their life change?did they start to see more of their friends than they had done previously? etc. In other words, I was not interested in the exact date on which their spouse had died, his age, the age of the widow(er) at the time or any other hard data (when this did receive a passing mention I often found answers to be wildly extravagant.) Rather I was concerned with the kind of information that dates and facts cannot reveal.

The manner in which I addressed my questions was something I paid close attention to. An article entitled "Talk to elders: social structure, attitudes and forms of address" warns that

> "condescending, paternalistic, insulting or even "nurturant" talk may serve to place the older person in a relationship in which the behaviour most likely to be realised is subservient or passive" (Wood and Ryan, 1991:183).

Many modifications of speech are likely to be made in conversation with elderly adults, such as slower speech rate, exaggerated intonation, greater repetition, simpler vocabulary

and reduced grammatical complexity. Individual modifications of speech are acceptable when communicating with particular old people with particular needs, but when modifications are not appropriate, when they are made to reflect stereotyped expectations, then they are highly damaging to the process of communication.

Aware of these possibilities I attempted most seriously to guard against any patronising tendencies I might have. I was aware that this might well manifest itself in "feeling sorry" for an informant, owing to their past or present circumstances. I tried hard not to "feel sorry" for anyone, recognising this to be an indication that I was "judging" them in some way and from my own perspective and that this attitude was constituting a barrier, preventing me from seeing things from the inside out. It was difficult not to feel dismay or even pain, however, in the presence of old people weeping - sometimes copiously - at the resurfacing of old memories. Sometimes, it was very easy to identify with their sadnesses and then feeling this way was not patronising but was perhaps a way of seeing things from the inside out - an elderly woman crying over the death of her own mother; an elderly man crying when he recalled how his parents' decision to move away from the place of his birth forced him to leave precious childhood friends behind. At other times their sorrows were very much removed from my own life experiences but were no less easy to understand: a woman who had wished very much to decorate her one room for her old age but had "left it too late"; a retired miner who had spent his evenings playing in a dance band and a jazz band and deriving great pleasure from his music but who no longer had the breath to play his trombone.

An emotional response to my questions, both among men and women, was very common for my elderly respondents. Conversely, those who betrayed no sign of an emotional response were particularly difficult to draw out in other respects too. Those who betrayed no emotion when talking about their past, when describing widowhood, who said they were neither lonely, bored, anxious or restless, kept a guard on their words too. Often, among elderly people, this attitude signified restraint and concealment, although outwardly they remained friendly. Indeed, people who showed no emotion made it less easy to see through the "opacity" of ordinary life and commonplace events. On certain days, everyone I saw cried which may well have been emotionally exhausting for me as a listener, but which also produced a rich harvest of insights. It was as if self-revelation would have resulted in a vulnerability which they were not prepared to present, either to others or perhaps, even especially, to themselves. Tears and any display of deep emotion may be considered to constitute an area of transparency, an act of revealing and enlightening. This may constitute one of the "dramatic occurrences" as analysed by Max Gluckman and Victor Turner. Wherever possible I looked for "social dramas", however small, seeing them as brightly illuminated moments or revelations in an otherwise featureless grey background. Turner (1957: 93) said:

> "The social drama is a limited area of transparency on the otherwise opaque surface of regular, uneventful social life".

Malinowski (1938:108) spoke of it thus:

> "The normal is far more difficult to penetrate than the exceptional, but it is equally important. The close study of such exceptional situations, however, may give the clue to much that is baffling in the uniform and impassive surface of everyday things..."[10]

1.9.2 "Passionate Neutrality"

Befriending a respondent encouraged her/him to reveal feelings, thoughts and opinions to me, some of which had been buried very deep. Many old people confessed to me afterwards; "I've never told anyone that before. You're the first person I've told." Initial reactions such as "I'm not any good at this" or "I doubt very much that I'll be able to help you" were often submerged in the friendly relationship that developed between us. I accepted every offer of tea and biscuits (learning to furtively clean with the edge of my sleeve the dusty rims that were a commonplace among weaksighted people), I looked at every photograph and boxing trophy, I walked in gardens and admired plants, I befriended fierce little dogs, listened to several more or less recognisable renditions of "It's not Unusual" played on a squeaky, electric organ in a freezing back bedroom, admired the entire contents of wardrobes, as shown to me piece by piece, chatted to assorted relatives and neighbours, more or less suspicious of me, who chanced to call in during my visits. Wild diversions in my interview format had to be tolerated if I were to succeed in building up the trust and confidence of my respondents. Sometimes, aims of interviews had to be abandoned, only to be picked up again in the next interview. Sometimes I was rewarded by encouraging responses such as that of Daniel John who said - "I like ... the way you're interrogating - and the way you put your questions - I understand it." One of the perennial "problems" that arose from this method was one I grew to know as "the photo album problem". My questions about family and friends would often prompt the old person to get down his/her photo album and from this point proceed to put faces to every name that had been alluded to during our conversation. Although I understood and sympathised with their sense of family pride, I found difficulty sometimes in retaining my enthusiasm in the face of endless piles of fifty year

old black and white photographs of someone's deceased cousin, aunt or in-laws. Interestingly enough, photographs were never recent, but very often showed the respondent in early youth or young middle age. Nor was this because they did not own any recent photographs: in one old man's home I noticed a photograph, depicting a seemingly recent gathering, positioned on a sideboard, but this was not one of the photographs he chose to show me, the latter being snapshots of him and his wife with a young family. So there is more to this sort of display than family pride, something based on continuity of identity, a desire to show the side of themselves that, while still there, is no longer visible in the grey hair and frail body.

Similarly, the early years featured prominently in every interview, again distinguishing elderly people from other age groups. The psychologist Tobin has observed that the

> "melding of past and present evidence to support the self-concept was remarkably different from evidence used by the younger persons that we studied who relied totally on incidents from their current interpersonal interaction to confirm the self" (1991:4).

Ford and Sinclair (1987) carried out a series of life-history type interviews with old women and found the same. They write:

> "Several of our interviews show that as we get older time perspectives change; it is often the earliest years that are recalled and given prominence rather than the mid years" (p120).

As Coleman (1990) has pointed out, there is also the more anthropological notion that reminiscence reflects the traditional role of elderly people as the preserver of memories and thus of tradition in society.

As I have indicated previously, the potentially disturbing effect of reliving the past for the old person made the subject matter highly sensitive at times and called for tact and gentleness, the use of long, patient silences wherein old memories could be pursued and captured, the abandoning of any rigorous hard pattern I may have crystallized in my mind and hopes prior to interviewing.

For example, Rachel, aged 92, spent much of one morning describing to me her youth and the long hours she had worked as a tailoress, from 8 in the morning till 8 at night, during the period of her 20s and early 30s. The only time of "leisure" she had enjoyed was chapel on a Sunday, and there was absolutely no time for young men (she remained single all her life). Currently living alone, the last of the family left alive, visited infrequently by a great-nephew and daily for an hour by a home help, it is unlikely that she had discussed her past with anyone for a considerably long time. I quickly learnt to adjust my pace and expectations in such situations. However I did make several mistakes during my first few trips into the field, these most often being to rush in during gaps in the conversation, not yet attuned to that particular inward-looking silence that falls upon an elderly person while trawling the depths of the past in her mind.

There has been much written in the literature about the difference between the young-old and the old-old. Originally made on the basis of health status it has now become an age distinction. A further age division is increasingly being drawn marking off the "oldest old" or the "very elderly" defined as those 85+ (Arber and Ginn,1991). Manuals and guides counsel interviewers on the different approaches to be used when interviewing the old-old and the young-old (for example, Schmidt, 1975). Going slower seems to be the

gist of the difference. But with my interviews, chronological age seemingly had little to do with the nature of the responses I received. A few examples will indicated how age in years is not the chief feature of an interviewee.

Agnes, although aged 88, was definitely "young-old" in manner. Friendship was very important to her - she was living in a sheltered home and enjoyed much contact with friends there, attending a daycentre also where she enjoyed a satisfying friendship with another woman. Her eyesight, hearing and mobility were good. Ivy, aged 80, was also young-old. She had moved down to Wales from London five years ago to live near, but not with, her daughter. She made daily trips to the shops by foot and visited neighbours in the area who needed help with their own shopping. She made regular sojourns abroad either alone or with the SAGA organisation.

But Mary, also in her early eighties, was old-old. She had never worked outside the home and had no hobbies, interests or friends of her own. She was in a wheelchair owing to "balance trouble" and attempted to do nothing for herself and no housework. Although her husband had pneumoconiosis he took care of his wife and of the housework.

These examples are further corroboration of the general line that I followed in my fieldwork throughout - the necessity to avoid generalisation, stereotype and assigning of people to categories tightly pinned in place by theories. As with so many other categories covered so far in ageing research, those of "old-old" and "young-old", while interesting to read and digest did not appear very relevant to this study[11].

Themes for anaylsis in Chapters II - VI

Chapter II will describe the setting in which this study took place, taking a longitudinal approach and comparing past with present. It will look at the cultural milieu of the particular generation of people taking part in this study and it will finally examine the differences between this culture and present day culture which are sufficiently marked to justify use of the term "the country of old age" to describe the current experience of the old people.

Chapter III will look at interaction with family, friends and neighbours and with the wider community in general. Some of the issues that will be covered include the importance of women and of mother-daughter links in this society; attitudes towards intergenerational living; and the nature and texture of relationships carried out with children, grand-children, siblings, and wider family. It will look at the different kinds of interactional relationships that exist with friends and with neighbours. It will look at the occasions in which these old people find themselves in interaction with the wider community, and their feelings about this. It will also examine the experience of loneliness and the circumstances in which it is likely to be engendered.

Chapter IV will look at dependence, independence and interdependency in old age. It will look at the ways in which the old people perceive these terms and the ways in which they see them relating to their own lives. It will look at independence and dependence in family relationships and in relationships with friends and neighbours and will look at the experience of reciprocity in these areas. The values old people give to these

experiences will be discussed, with particular reference to their consequent bearing on self-image.

Chapter V focuses on gender in old age, looking at masculinity/femininity as expressed in social roles and behaviour. Gender issues - the way that elderly men may be distinguishable from elderly women - will be examined for several key aspects of old age, namely retirement; declining health; the marital relationship in old age; bereavement, widowhood and widowerhood; parenthood and grandparenthood; sexuality in old age; definitions of masculinity and femininity in old age.

Finally, Chapter VI will attempt to summarise the main themes of this study, also drawing out the implicit themes that run like an undercurrent beneath all the major ideas expressed here, focusing mainly on the process of continuity and change over the lifespan.

NOTES

1. Di Gregorio (1986) believes that there are three generic classifications under which the current literature on the sociology of old age and ageing can be subsumed and these include integration theory (comprising activity theory, disengagement theory, socialization theory and continuity theory), sub-cultural theory and stratification theory.

2. "Life history" has been defined by Patrick McNeill(1985:85) as "the autobiography of a person which has been obtained through interview and guided conversation".

3. This questionnaire was structured and looked at physical dependency levels together with quality of life.

4. Also see Myerhoff and Tufte (1975).

5. Eighty has been seen as the time from which people start to lose their health: see Wenger (1987)

6. See Glaser, and Strauss (1967).

7. This has been observed in other studies of grandparents: see Cunningham-Burley (1984).

8. Another reason may have been that although I carefully explained to them that these conversations constituted part of my research for a PhD most old people persisted in assuming that I was studying to be a medical doctor - for them, as for many people, "doctor" holds no other meaning.

9. See Harrison (1983) who finds similar occurrences with old Australian women.

10. Frankenberg,R (1966): British Community Studies:Problems of Synthesis, in Banton, M (ed)The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies,London: Tavistock.

11. Nevertheless, these terms shall be employed from time to time in this study simply for the purpose of indicating to which chronological age-band an individual belongs.

CHAPTER II

SETTING: A PROFILE OF THE AREA UNDER STUDY, PAST AND PRESENT

It is extremely important to stress the fact that this study is a study of a number of people who live in a particular, defined locality. It is not intended to lift the findings presented here into the level of generalizations pertaining to all elderly people. On the contrary it is necessary to understand these old age experiences as arising from and being intrinsic to the setting in which they take place.

In this chapter I have drawn on the work of history books and compilations of historical statistics as well as contemporary tables and statistics published by OPCS, the General Household Survey, the Welsh Office and West Glamorgan County Council. This gives the background against which to locate my findings. Alongside this and indeed within this, I have attempted to present a subjective view of past and present local history and society from the perspective of its old people. There may be said to be two versions of events, sometimes overlapping, sometimes aeons apart, then: a detached, impersonal, "outsider's" view; and a living, personal, deeply idiosyncratic inner view. This latter is the view I have been interested to develop most fully. The setting described in the following pages, then, is not just the environment you would find about you if you came down into the area, but is also and most particularly the environment as viewed and experienced by the old people who have lived here for most of their lives.

2.1 Geographical and Demographic characteristics

2.1.1 Overview

The setting for my study of old age and ageing was South West Wales, comprising several communities which all fall in the county of West Glamorgan. The communities all possess rather different characters. The two valleys extending outwards from Neath, (i.e the Neath and the Dulais Valley) together with the Swansea, Afan and Amman Valleys are coalfield country, producing anthracite coal (although only one working pit remains in this area today). The urban areas of Morriston and Briton Ferry were once the site of thriving industries - iron, steel, copper, tinplate and zinc in Morriston, with tinplate as its major industry; tin, steel, iron and the docklands in Briton Ferry. Morriston lost its last tinworks in the 1950s and Briton Ferry its last metalworks in 1978. Port Talbot, below Neath and east of Swansea, also highly urbanised, has suffered less through closures. It is the site of the giant BP chemical works and the British Steelworks, both still in operation.

The area contains other diversities in terms of its natural geographical features. It has a long coastline but within half a mile of this at Swansea, Briton Ferry and Port Talbot the mountains begin and reach enormous heights of almost 2,000 feet at their maximum. There are extensively forested areas to the east together with the flat, bare mountainsides associated with coalmining areas. For years, in the anthracite valleys, pastoral farming continued to be carried out side by side with the pits (see Brennan et al, 1954) and indeed, the area still has a rural feel, with the slow pace and friendliness one associates with country areas.

2.1.2 Diversity and Sameness

The diversity, occurring within a very few miles, is a challenge to the visitor as he/she attempts to put a finger on the character of the region. Indeed, the region possesses many "characters". Sandfields, the post-war council estate housing Port Talbot's steel and chemical industry workers has a distinctive character of its own. Pontardawe, in the heart of the Swansea Valley, has another. And so on. The inhabitants of the locality acknowledge these differences. A steelworker from Port Talbot told me

> "I don't have very much understanding of the Valley people. They're very different from Port Talbot. Each valley is very different from every other. They're not very friendly in the Valleys. They're closed in ,they don't like strangers.Except for Ammanford. Ammanford is friendly. Cwmavon: now I don't mind them, either."

Sal, living in the Dulais Valley, suggested that the difference between her valley and the Swansea Valley was that, in the latter, people were much more "Welshy". The difference between Valley and town people was that "You're closer together in the Valley".

Katie said:

> "In the Aberdare Valley people seem to be polite and caring somehow... in the Rhondda now they were more sure of themselves, they'd stand up for themselves more...its very Welshy in the Swansea Valley... In the Amman Valley they're a bit more wealthy than in the Aberdare and Rhondda."

But she described how, where she lived in the Dulais Valley, the community was small and caring.

> "In Dyffryn Cellwen we've got a Post Office, a chemist and a school and a small tuck shop and one grocer shop.. if anything's wrong everybody's involved, everybody's concerned."

Dawson (1990) observed similarly in his study of pit villages in north-east England how differences in localities were highlighted by their residents, in order to emphasise

community. However many differences may exist within this region, and to whatever degree they may have been exaggerated by the residents, I consider it to have been a fruitful exercise to incorporate in this study people who live in various of these areas, rather than concentrating on one narrow area within the region. Although there are local particularism and local loyalties still prevalent amongst the elderly people there are common threads uniting them too. Most of the men have worked in one or more of the main industries - steel, coal, tinplate or chemicals - according to the fluctuations occasioned by unemployment and closures. They have shared a common working experience, as have their wives whose working day has very much depended on the nature of their husband's work. Furthermore, some families have migrated from one valley to another, from Port Talbot to Glynneath and so on, looking for work, although it is true that among this group of old people most have remained in or very close to the place of their birth, more movement of settlement having occurred in the generation that parented this one. It can, for sure, be easy to forget the links that unite the various communities and at first sight the differences can appear huge. The straight rows of 1940s council houses in Sandfields Estate are a world apart from the tiny, caterpillar rows of terraces that cling to the side of the mining valleys. But we must not overlook the similarities beneath the obvious differences. This is a region that historically has been characterised by a highly mobile, shifting population. In many cases the people were not just similar but, because of the search for work that dominated their lives, they were the same, they or their parents or members of their family having lived in one valley at one point in time, another valley or town at some other point. Rosina, who lived in Neath town, maintained that the Valleys were so near noone made a distinction between "us"

and "them". For this reason she believed there to be no real difference between their ways and the ways of the people in Neath town.

2.1.3 Population

The population (using 1988 figures, in West Glamorgan County Guide,1990) of West Glamorgan as a whole is 362,900 of which the following main centres contain the following population:

Swansea - 186,900

Lliw Valley Borough (including the Swansea Valley)- 61,800

Neath- 65,200

Port Talbot - 49,000

In the County of West Glamorgan, 16.7% of the population is 65 and over, of which 48.5% are males and 51.5% are females.

Apart from the major towns, which contain most of the population, the area consists of relatively small villages and settlements separated from each other by the twists and turns of the valleys. For example, Pontardawe and Ystalyfera in the Swansea Valley have populations of 4,000 and 2,750 respectively. Even smaller villages of Trebannws, Ynysmeudwy and Rhyd-y-fro surround Pontardawe and, together with small, neighbouring farms, make up the community of Pontardawe. In the case of Ystalyfera, the villages of Godre'rgraig and Cilmaengwyn make up the community of Ystalyfera. In

the Neath Valley the small community of Clyne, situated between Tonna and Resolven, is made up of two tiny villages: Clyne and Melyn Court.

2.2 Local industries and their local history

The discovery of rich supplies of coal in the area and the development of coalmining were responsible for the development of industry in this area and the growth of the various communities. This industrial heritage goes back 250 years, reaching its peak in the first quarter of the twentieth century and thereafter entering a period of decline, which affected the lives of all of the people in this study.

2.2.1 Coalmining

This south western region of Wales produced mainly anthracite coal and the development of the coalfield occurred later than the steamcoal-producing eastern valleys, but its decline also came later. The small village communities grew up to house the miners around the valley pit heads and the peak production of the South Wales coalfield came in 1913, when the area was producing one third of the world's coal - a fact, and others like it, still related to me proudly by the old people in this study. The mining industry provided one job in five and remained the major employer of labour in this area in 1948, although its decline had begun with the ending of World War Two. In 1937 there were 106 collieries in this area (Brennan and Cooney, 1950), but today none remain in this area; indeed there is only one working mine in South Wales and that is based in Aberdare, Mid Glamorgan. The last remaining pit in the Dulais Valley, Cefn

Coed, was shut in 1968 and the Blaenant Colliery in the Neath Valley was shut in July 1990. Indeed, as an observer in this area, while hoping to observe a working pit for the first time, I was to be sadly disappointed. During my sojourn in the area, the nearest I came to this was the "colliery museum" where a shut-down pit had been preserved for the benefit of schoolchildren and day trippers. The greatest number of pit closures in South Wales occurred in the 1960s when 74 mines were closed across the coalfield (see Egan, 1987). Although these communities exist today, indeed, they seem to have lost their point, clustering around pitheads that have long since been closed. A few factories have opened but they are in no way able to take their place as an employer of labour. To the elderly people this does not matter; it might, indeed, seem appropriate for the reason for their existence to lie in the past. In many cases, these old mining communities have turned into dormitory towns for commuters working in the factories and offices of Swansea and Neath. They have not, as yet, acquired new distinctive characters: like their aged inhabitants, they are backward-looking. This process is reflected in the steep decline in the number of shops, to which several old people made reference. Indeed, as far back ago as 1963,[3] Margaret Stacey, writing in New Society, called her article about the Lower Swansea Valley, "Life in a Derelict Valley", and asked the question: "But who will live in the Valley now? Only the unsuccessful?" (p12).

2.2.2 Metal working industries

Iron and steel, tinplate, copper, zinc and more recently aluminium, titanium and nickel, have all been worked in this region and once provided jobs for the people who are now elderly. The metalworking industry had been the second largest employer of labour after

mining during the first half of the century and its decline was linked to the decline in coalmining. It is hard to imagine today that the small village of Ystalyfera once contained the largest ironworks in the world, at its peak a little over 100 years ago. Elderly people reminisced about this, with a little wonder in their voice and Will, a retired tin worker, repeated constantly: "They don't do it today: there are no tinworks today" as if in disbelief.

The British Steel works in Port Talbot, established in 1908, continues to be of importance in the area, however, and Alcoa, established in 1959 in Swansea, is another important employer. Metalbox in Neath, established in 1934 and once providing jobs for many of the people now in their old age, continues to produce can tops and printed tin plated steel and aluminium for packaging, now under the name of CMB Packaging.

2.2.3 Other industries

The Ford Motor Company was established in Swansea in 1965 and Trw Cam Gears set up in 1946 outside Resolven, producing steering assemblies, both of which have provided jobs for the people who are now elderly. Likewise, BP Chemicals was opened in 1963 and continues to produce chemical products.

2.3 The structural aspects of the society

2.3.1 Immigration and emigration

Populations in the valleys and surrounding areas have never been stable. Figures given by David Egan (1987) show that between 1851 and 1911 altogether 366,000 people moved into Glamorgan, Monmouth and Carmarthen, the peak occurring between 1901 and 1911. Egan wrote (1987:71):

> "(South Wales) absorbed immigrants at this time at a faster rate than anywhere in the world except the USA!".

The Irish were the biggest group of immigrants, but they came from all areas of the UK as well as Spain, Russia, Poland, France and Italy. 12% of the elderly people I interviewed had originated elsewhere than the place in which they were currently living, although in the vast majority of cases this was no more than a neighbouring valley away, often a steam-coal producing valley. However one elderly man was the son of Spanish immigrants. Migration from rural areas of West Wales was very common and during the severe economic depression of the 1920s families moved over the valleys, from pit to pit or pit to steel/tinworks, wherever employment beckoned. Altogether 500,000 people left South Wales between the wars, completely reversing the trends of the previous half century (Egan,1987). This continual flux of population gave the area a particular character. It placed a great importance on the neighbours one had, for example, as people left their wider families behind and were obliged to rely on neighbours for the things that otherwise they may have entrusted to their families - child minding and guidance in bringing up children, help in times of sickness or emergency, companionship especially for the women while their husbands were at work. Neighbouring remains important to elderly people whose families today have often moved away, looking today for a different kind of work. The inability to settle for long in one area, and this

especially applies to the steam coal valleys, may have also made the people of that time cling to beliefs and values such as Chapel, and/or trade union ideology, which provided some kind of continuity in their lives.

2.3.2 Housing Conditions

A distinctive feature of the mining communities has been the high proportion of home ownership among the current elderly generation, up to 60% in some areas and more in the anthracite valleys. In one Valley area - the Dulais - the proportions were as follows: 39% lived in privately owned terraced houses; 28% lived in council accommodation (either a house or flat) and 5% lived in rented accommodation. This occurrence was not so frequent in the surrounding urban areas of Port Talbot, Neath, Briton Ferry and Morriston. The great numbers of immigrants, however, resulted in a permanent housing shortage which gave rise to overcrowding. Among the people I interviewed, for those living in the Port Talbot area, the percentage living in council, or formerly council occupation, was as high as 90%. Privacy was a luxury, even for bathing. Phyllis said when anyone had a bath in her home everyone else had to go out:

> "I know when I went older I was very shy: all out, and I'd be on my own here."

A shortage of space to carry out domestic duties put great stress on wives but the emphasis on family and, where it was not available, on neighbouring, meant that help was usually at hand to ease the burden. Children as young as five years old would help out in this process. Some individuals could not even claim a bed of their own - the shift system and large families meant that in some, especially mining, households, one brother got up from bed to start the morning shift while another returned from the night shift,

to occupy the same bed, thereafter rising to make room in the bed for the return of a brother from the afternoon shift.

B.L. Coombes, writing in his autobiography in the 1930s, paints a vivid picture of the cramped living conditions experienced by a young married couple recently moved into "apartments" crowded with other people:

> "The front room, our living room, was about ten feet square, and the bedroom about the same size. Our words had to be low spoken, else they could be heard in the kitchen. The scrape of a chair, or even the creak of a bed, could be heard by the other family... All our work had to be done in that one room...Washing the clothes was a problem.. Our washing was done in the room and the drying on lines under the ceiling. My dressing and undressing from dusty working clothes did not improve the clothes or the furniture." (Coombes, 1939 :90/91).

It must indeed present a challenge, late in life, for those elderly individuals who have survived their spouse and seen their offspring move away only to find themselves occupying a house which has now become far too big for them. Olive did not want to move from her home.

> "But sometimes I think: why am I keeping all these rooms for myself? And I came to this house when I was ten. And it's hard to give it up."

For the first time they have privacy but also they have no function to fulfil in the family unit, they are no longer a link in a chain and with young people moving in next door they have no neighbours to rely on either, or to provide them with some kind of purpose. Indeed, Dorothy Jerrome remarks:

> "In structural terms, there are today two typical situations in old age. One is to be almost totally alone; the other is to be at the pinnacle of a three- or four-generation family" (Jerrome, 1990:207)

While the situations we have been describing above represent the first position, Agnes is a good example of the second. She told me:

> "The children, grand-children and great-grandchildren: they're very close. And they're talking about it in C- (her sheltered home) mind; how close we are, then."

Proudly, she described the response of a neighbour:

> "One of them, she's got two children, but she said, "To see you with all your great-grandchildren around you: how lucky you are.""

2.3.3 Working conditions

Working conditions in the three major industries - coalmining, steel and tin - were undeniably hard; hot, dangerous, unpredictable and requiring great amounts of physical stamina from its workers. My respondents did not concur on which of the industries had been the hardest to work in. Arthur, a retired steelworker who had started in the mines, had no doubt that mining was the hardest occupation. Raymond, a retired steelworker also, had loved his job and did not consider it hard at all. John Huw, suffering from pneumoconiosis, said mining was the worst occupation you could go into and was glad when his son became a first grade fitter with Ford, instead of following him into the mines. Daniel John had worked in all three industries. He had no doubt as to which of the three was most demanding. He recalled:

> "There were four of us in the pub and it nearly went to fighting: which was the hardest job of the four. One was a miner. Another working in the steelworks. The other in the tinworks. And the other one on the railways. I turned round and told them: "Listen boys, we're all brothers. There's all hard, hard workers - work the salt off our bodies. But hardest of all in my opinion and I'd worked in several different industries, was the tinworks.""

Below, we will examine the various industries and the demands placed by each one on its workers.

a) Mining

Mining was the occupation of more men and boys in the Valley area up to 1961 than any other occupation. 46% of the men involved in this study, either as husbands of the female informants or as male informants themselves, had worked in mining.

South Wales was one of the most dangerous coalfield areas to work in because of its difficult geological conditions and its deep and gassy mines which presented the possibility of constant explosion and roof fall or sudden flooding. The danger of work-related illnesses was also very high. Figures in Brennan, Cooney and Pollins (1954) state that the average annual number of new cases of certified silicosis in Welsh anthracite mines was 5.23 per thousand workers - a figure considerably higher than the average of 0.06 in English and Scottish mines. Katie's father, a miner, died young. She told me:

> "He went underground at 11 and he was the delicate type, you see. He was more studious. He wasn't cut out for the mines... In the winter, my father never used to see the daylight."

The following description of the miner's working conditions, although taken from Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter's 1956 study of a Yorkshire mining village, is very insightful. Indeed, for 46% of my male respondents, twelve hours a day for upwards of 40 years had been spent in such conditions:

> "He literally never knows quite what to expect in the way of working conditions. Natural variations of many kinds can confront him. On some days the roof or floor will move inwards with tremendous force. In more serious cases, this can close in a whole stretch of face; very often it causes falls of several tons of stone and endangers the system of supports which has been constructed.... Besides facing the danger of large-scale

> movements of the roof, the collier must be prepared for the danger from the actual condition of the stone immediately above him"(p41/2).

Many of the Welsh autobiographies of the period talk about the great terror elderly women feel to see the men come home early from the pit as it usually signifies that an accident has occurred and whose father, husband or son may it have involved this time?

For years some miners were paid a piece-rate which further contributed to the precariousness of their situation in that they could never be sure from week to week how much pay they would be bringing home to their families. A minimum wage was introduced for all miners in 1912, a concession won as a result of the National Miners' Strike of the same year.

And yet these conditions produced a closeness. Bulmer, in his analysis of mining communities, writes:

> "Miners are a distinct and important group within the working class as a whole, characterised both by the extreme conditions under which they are required to labour and by the solidarity which they display towards employers and the outside world" (Bulmer, 1975, p64).

One of my informants offered this view of the miners:

> "They were so close-knit, the miners. They were different to the other industries. Very down-to-earth, the miners."

b) Metalworking industries

Workers in these industries, particularly tin, faced searingly high temperatures and dangers from burns, explosions and cuts - the most feared of which in the tin industry was the dreaded "doubler's cut." Daniel John explained to me how any drop of water reaching the floor would immediately boil. Dermatitis was not uncommon among

workers in these industries. To offset this, however, steel and tinplate workers enjoyed more prospects and greater opportunity in the way of promotion and salary advancement and did not suffer the economic depression of the 1930s to the extent that miners did.

2.3.4 Employment of women in this area

Employment figures for women have been consistently lower in South Wales than in the UK as a whole. The chief industries involved heavy labour and were largely unsuitable for women, although small numbers of women did work in the steel and tin industries. For example: in 1914 there were 3,350 women employed in the iron and steel industry (Owen-Jones, 1987). By the end of the war 800 women had replaced men in the iron and steel industry. In the tin industry, young girls in the 14-20 age group tended to work in the cold-rolls, "not many old maids" worked in this section (Owen-Jones, 1987). The work was thought to be easier: sorting, opening, stacking and putting the plates through the "roughing", "ailwath" and "finishing" process before they went to the pickling. Only experienced women worked in the pickling section and they were thought of as "special women" because they laboured under such difficult conditions. A move to the mills was thought of as a promotion and

> "you had to wait your turn to go to the mills, you had to wait for someone to finish before you had a move up" (Owen-Jones, 1987:45).

Figures produced in 1953 and 1968 show the involvement of women in the workforce to be 32% compared with the national average of 40%, most of the jobs taken by women being in the services, sport and recreation industries (Williams, 1985). Social factors played a part here as there was always a reluctance in Welsh society to accept the idea of women - especially married women - going out to work. I found that where married

women had gone out and taken jobs they tended in conversation to underplay the significance of them. They never competed with their husband's role of breadwinner and always firmly acknowledged that their jobs had been secondary in importance to their duties and obligations about the house. However, elderly women who had worked outside the home while married were a definite minority. It was quite common to work before marriage, very often "in service", although many women took the path, instead, of "staying home to help mother." Spinsters were the only group of women who consistently stayed in employment throughout their lives. Among these, I came across retired schoolmistresses, a postmistress and several tailoresses, shop assistants and factory workers. The schoolmistress position, of course, was the classic occupation for the academically minded Valley spinster and one which gave great social status. Before 1939, at the very least, this was the only job that offered the opportunity of career advancement to women at all, working class women being generally discouraged from finding employment even in the worst of the depression years (Morgan,1982). Women widowed young took jobs, sometimes for the first time, and maintained them up to retirement age.

2.3.5 Unemployment

Intermittent unemployment was a characteristic feature of this region of South Wales during the working lives of people who are now elderly. A characteristic pattern was for men to have worked in several different industries throughout their lives, owing to closures and the need to move from one place of employment to another. Where men had stayed in one industry, such as mining, it was characteristic for them to have worked

in several pits, changing pit particularly in the later part of their lives, which coincided with the decline in the mining industry.

A man's working history might run as follows:

a) John Huw, aged 81, currently residing in Crynant:miner

He began his working life in the Mardy colliery, across in the Rhondda Valley, aged 14. His father worked in the same pit - pit number 3. He worked in the Mardy colliery for eleven years when pit closures following the 1926 strike forced him to move across to the Dulais valley. From digging coal underground at Mardy he moved on to shoeing horses for underground work at the Onllwyn Colliery. In 1938, four years later, he moved to the Seven Sisters colliery, again following pit closures. At that time, he told me, he was working with Englishmen and Scotsmen and people were travelling from Maesteg and over the Valleys to work in that pit. In Seven Sisters he was looking after a screening plant where the coal was being separated. He finished work at Seven Sisters in the 1960s and went to the Cefn Coed pit, again where work was to be found, where he was underground looking after the boring machinery. This was to be John Huw's last position as a miner.When I met him he was disabled with pneumoconiosis.

b) Raymond, aged 71 from Pontardawe: steelworker

His career in the steelworks at Pontardawe started when he was 14. He began by chipping bricks, then worked his way up to more senior positions. He worked in the same steelworks till they closed down 43 years later. Thereafter, he moved to the tinworks, where he contracted dermatitis and was on sick leave for nine months. An

explosion caused him to lose his hearing totally in one ear and he was obliged to retire at the age of 55 owing to ill health.

c) Arthur, aged 69, from Morriston: steelworker

He was 15 when he began his working life at the steelworks at Cwmbwrla. The reason he chose to enter this industry as opposed to any other was a common one for people of his generation - proximity. It appears that the two main factors in determining choice of occupation among the working class of this region were nearness of the job location and/or occupation of father/brothers. After going to serve in World War Two Arthur returned to the steelworks. He began as a fitter's mate and went on to a position in charge of maintaining the furnaces. When the steelworks shut down Arthur went to work in a local plastics factory and when this closed he moved on to a crisp factory. Following each of the closures, although Arthur was fortunate in getting work immediately, he described experiencing feelings of depression, particularly when the steelworks closed down because he had enjoyed it very much there.

d) Will, aged 90, from Clyne: tin worker

Will worked in the tinworks, starting at the age of 13, because his father who was working there took him with him. He began his career bundling in the mills, paid a piece-rate. He met his wife there - she was working in the sorting room sorting out the plates. He worked his way up to the furnaces and ended as a doubler. He began work in the tinworks in Clyne, a quarter of an hour's walk from his home. Later, when these works finished in 1938 he went on to work in various tinworks all round the region: in Port Talbot, in the Melin in Neath, in Morriston, working in all the tinworks in the area

as each closed in turn, taking buses to work. The last job he had was in Rheola aluminium works from 1942-1967 when all the tinworks were shut down. His last job was easier than the rest, he felt. He retired from there and they presented him with a gold watch.

Unemployment as suffered by these men was the result of a general economic decline as South Wales lost the markets to which it had previously exported coal. The famous General Strike of 1926, constantly cited by the elderly generation, did nothing to aid the miner's position. Miners' wages drifted downwards for over a decade until in 1935 South Wales miners were awarded their first pay increase for over ten years.

Unfavourable economic conditions manifested themselves firstly in the closing down of pits especially in the 1960s and, particularly from the 1950s on, in the closing down of metal smelting and metal refining works.

The highest unemployment figure for South Wales was recorded in August 1932, being 224,591 (Williams, 1985) though the percentage of unemployment in that region had been well above the national average consistently. For example, in 1968 the figures for the region for unemployment were 3.6% as compared with 2.4% for the UK as a whole. Daniel John was able to compare the unemployment situation today with the way it was in the locality in the 1930s. He said:

> "You can say eight months of the year they were out without a job. The same that's happening today. There's no difference."

However, the anthracite area of South Wales coalfield was much less badly affected than was the eastern steam-coal producing region. Indeed, in the south-west, where anthracite

mining and tinplate manufacture dominated the industrial scene, the unemployment rate was comparatively low, at 3.4% and 8.3% in 1923 and 1930 respectively (Baber and Thomas, 1980). My observations would also suggest that early retirement was commonplace in this region, precipitated largely by job-related sickness or disability.

So, when looking at working conditions experienced by the people of this area who are now elderly, we can see that while the work itself was dangerous and uncertain, employment was insecure and characterised, to some extent, by a flux of employment and unemployment. These factors certainly played a part in moulding the mentality of individuals. In terms of behaviour, men exhibited a fierce sense of solidarity with peer group males which they continue to show in old age, although in a more subdued and less exuberant manner. This was centred around the activities of drinking and, in old age, reminiscing. There is a definite "boyo" character, a show of macho bravado combined with an almost courtly deference to women based on sincere appreciation of and affection for their wives. Indeed, there were two teams to which men owed their loyalty - the working team of men to whom they owed their safety and even their lives if underground, and the team comprising husband and wife to which they owed the smooth functioning of their household and the comfort of their leisure hours. In behaviour, many older women appear hard headed, practical and cautious in contrast to the cavalier lightheartedness of many elderly men. The constant uncertainty endemic in such a way of life may also have contributed to the strong beliefs found in this area - the commitment to political or religious ideas or both - which seemed to provide some continuity and gave some purpose to unpredictable daily living. It almost certainly

contributed to the character of neighbouring as exhibited in this locality - which is a common feature of localities gripped by dire economic conditions and attendant poverty.

2.3.6 Emphasis on kin and locality

Communities were small and grew up clustered round the local seat of employment. This applied as much to the urban as to the valley areas, the urban areas often giving the appearance of overgrown, built-up villages. Indeed, in many cases [1], that is exactly what they were, in that they comprised a couple of one-time villages that had spilled into one another. In the generation of the elderly people, son worked alongside father and today, if you go into an old people's daycentre or residential home and ask any elderly individual from one locality if they know a named same age individual from that locality they will almost undoubtedly say that they do, either personally or by reputation. This is a manifestation of what has been called "intense local patriotism" inherent in certain South-West Wales communities where it has been said, with some exaggeration, that an offer of new houses three miles away is interpreted as a plan for "uprooting people from the land of their birth" (Brennan, Cooney, Pollins, 1954). Dai, aged 80, from Glynneath said to me, with pride:

> "Everyone in this area knows who I am. You ask for David J- and they'll say: "Oh, he lives in so-and-so.""

If that continuity of knowledge no longer exists in this community, if people work in a great variety of occupations now, travelling to work in all directions, it did not affect Dai or the truth of what he claimed. The "everyone" he was referring to comprised his age mates and the offspring of this generation. The community he referred to and still belonged to was the old community, which continued very much to exist, although a new

community had long since developed below it and around it, occupying the same geographical, but not mental, space. Mary noticed in the street how only the older people would talk to her; "there's not many of us left now." In Phyllis' case, the "community" which occupied her mental space were those whom she had known years ago, whether alive today or not. She said:

> "And I'm dreaming so much of all the ones that have gone. I'm with them every night, still. Mostly the girls I worked down the factory with."

This community placed a great emphasis on neighbouring as an activity, which is a typical feature of communities experiencing social homogeneity and dire economic circumstances (Abrams, 1980). Abrams observes that in fact the circumstances in which friendships within neighbourhoods will be common and strong are well known. They are almost without exception indicative of general social conditions whose passing can hardly be lamented, neighbourhood solidarity being

> "embedded in a world governed in the equal measure by both necessity (the overriding force of social conditions one cannot alter or control) and accident (the hazards of a life unavoidably beyond one's control)" (1980:14).

Indeed, interdependence among this generation

> "had been generated by the lack of resources and the need to cooperate over the use of domestic facilities" (Allan,1985:134).

At first sight the descriptions presented in this Chapter of frequent migrations through the Valleys, combined with the description of an intense local patriotism may appear contradictory. However, various factors must be taken into consideration when accounting for these ideas.

Firstly, most of the population movement into the Valley areas took place among the generation that parented the current elderly generation in this study, the peak

inmigration occurring in the first decade of the twentieth century, so it really provides a background to the lives of this generation. Many of the elderly people in this study, indeed, can claim to have one locally-born parent perhaps and one who moved in from farming land in Pembrokeshire or Carmarthenshire.

Secondly, the lifetime of this current elderly generation coincides with the period of prosperity in the anthracite coalfield: since the end of World War One, the Dulais Valley in the eastern part of the anthracite coalfield made up the most prosperous part of the South Wales coalfield. Inmigration from the steam-coal Valleys continued but in the early 1930s large-scale inmigration ceased and the position remained fairly stable until 1948, since when migration has been fairly local: e.g. in the use of the Dulais Valley southwards within the Valley to Aberhenwaun and more recent Council House estates in Seven Sisters and Neath (Evans, 1961). The most flourishing pits and those which attracted the great majority of immigrant miners included Steers Pit in Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen; the Onllwyn Collieries; Cefn Coed, near Crynant; Aberpergwm near Glynneath (figures in Howell,1938). Again, Evans figures for 1938 show that even though a lot of people came from other locations to work in the Glynneath Colliery, most workers (468) lived between 0 and 1 mile from the colliery; 117 live 11 miles and more away. Again, with a few years' experience behind him a miner could be ensured of reasonable stability of employment: operation of the seniority rule at collieries within the area militated against transference of skilled workers from one pit to another and a stream of labour tended to occur only with casual labour.

Thirdly, with the unemployment between the wars there was a vast displacement of people from the Valleys, but most of these occurred in the steam coal Valleys - the population of the Rhondda falling 13% in the 1920s (Morgan,1982) and most of these migrants never returned. Unemployment was worse in the Merthyr, Dowlais and Rhondda Valleys (Morgan, 1982). Figures quoted in Egan (1987) show that between 1921 and 1931 the Rhondda lost 22.6% of its population, while Pontardawe lost 1.1%.

Thus, Sewel, with justification, can speak of the rundown in colliery employment and population decline in the 1960s as bringing the Dulais Valley to the close of a relatively stable period, which had its origins in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This historical period in the Dulais

> "has been long enough for a generation to grow up who have spent all or most of their lives in the Valley."(1975:9)

He speaks too of this way of life as "the only way of life that many have known" (1975:10). Sewel's study notes that the period of most severe contraction and colliery closure in the Dulais Valley was between 1962 and 1968 when previously famously productive collieries all closed: Onllwyn no 3 in 1962; Seven Sisters 1963; Onllwyn no 1 in 1964; Dillwyn in 1965; Cefn Coed, 1968.

Below, these points will be illustrated briefly with reference to the working history and moves connected with employment among a representative selection of my "sample."

Elwyn (Clydach): Started work aged 14 in Clydach in a colliery there. He worked there for 37 years, then moved to another colliery nearby in 1959, remaining in employment there till 1960. Then he went to Alcoa in Swansea, remaining there for 15 years. That

involved a round-trip of 20 miles, but he preferred to make that journey rather than uproot from his home. He told me,

> "I tell you what I missed, I missed the colliery when I went down to Alcoa... different kind of people altogether."

His wife had worked before they got married, as a servant girl in Clydach, but she didn't work outside the home after their marriage.

Daniel John (Ynysmeudwy; currently living Pontardawe). After working in the local pit for four years, he moved to the tinworks in Pontardawe where he worked for 30 years. He was then laid off and he took a job in Margam at the steelworks. He finally retired from the steelworks fourteen years later.

Stan: (born Onllwyn: first generation of Spanish immigrant parents). He started overground in the mines when he was 14 and he worked in the same pit - Dulais Valley Pit, no 3 as he told me - graduating up to be the Production Manager. Then the colliery closed down and for the handful of years up to his retirement age he went to work at the aluminium factory in Resolven.

Jack: (Aberavon). After beginning work in the mines when he was 16 he then moved to the Port Talbot tinworks, firing in the boilers for 22 years. Then he moved to the Abbey Steelworks in Port Talbot for 18 years.

Mary (Morriston). She enjoyed a steady working history. She was 25 years working in the plating department of the Corgi toy factory. Her husband worked in the Parks all his life and was for 18 years' Parks Manager.

Rosina (Briton Ferry). Her husband's working life is characterised by greater instability. He worked as a tin worker in the Gwalia works in Briton Ferry. When the Gwalia closed he worked on the railways temporarily. Then he went to the Metal Box in Neath. One of Rosina's brothers went to Birmingham in search of work; the other two lived and worked locally. Rosina has lived in Briton Ferry all her life. She herself worked only for seven months when she was married - in the tin mines: in the First Aid room then in the canteen.

The old community defined you by your place in a family, by your group of relatives and family connections and history. This did not mean that it judged you categorically by your family background, for it recognized the possibility of individual achievement and bettering oneself and it placed great store on education as a means to this end. It has been remarked that this tendency to introversion leads to nepotism and a preference for locals as marriage partners (Leonard, 1980). This tendency is also a great leveller and has contributed in this region of the UK to the smaller importance placed on class. Diana Leonard suggests that it is the stress on origins, on where you come from, which

> "masks status differences between wage workers and the few professional and managerial families in the "urban villages""(1980:26).

But it is also true that most of the elderly population in this area can be accurately described as working class. Figures for 1954 (Brennan, Cooney, Pollins, 1954) suggest that there was more homogeneity of income in South Wales than in any other region of the UK, calculating the proportion of working class to middle class as approximately 80%-20%. Again, the area had less white-collar and skilled manual workers among the active population (Balchin, 1971). At the same time intergenerational mobility has been high. Figures for 1965 (Balchin, 1971) show that one quarter of the working population

has moved between the manual and white collar categories: 41% of the sons of men in white collar occupations have moved down into manual work and 23% of the sons of manual workers have moved up to the white collar grades. Certainly among the people I interviewed and got to know, retired colliers, police constables and steelworkers had sons and daughters who were headmasters, civil servants, lawyers and bank managers.

Walter Haydn Davies, who was born in 1903, in his life story makes the point that he belonged to a generation of college students whose parents had made, and were making tremendous sacrifices to give their children a better chance of life than they themselves had enjoyed (Davies, 1972).

Class/status

Hutson and Stacey suggest that people in the Lower Swansea Valley were status conscious but not class conscious as such, attaching importance more to the state of the home, dress, or tidiness of the street. Citing a 1978 survey, they write:

> "The people living in the Valley did not perceive themselves in class terms, but did perceive gradations of a kind not allowed for in the social classes or socio-economic groups of the Registrar General. The key informants talked more in terms of "young" "old" or "newcomers"." (1979:104)

Gwyn Evans (1961) in his study of Onllwyn similarly differentiates between social status and the fact that the community is single-class.

> "Although it is a single-class society, social status is important and is determined primarily by occupational status. Despite these internal divisions the community possesses a high degree of unity and solidarity provided by common residence and the occupational bond"(1961:1)

There are a few middle-class people in this study and where there are differences in their behaviour, as compared to the vast majority of the working class people mentioned here, I note these differences as they appear in the text. Perhaps, however, it would be worth noting here some differences and similarities between working class and more middle-class old people who made up part of this group.

Ella could be described as middle-class, her late husband having been a professional man, registrar of a college in Margam. Despite his professional status, he still didn't positively anticipate retirement -"he didn't like being "useless" if you want to put it that way." Ella distances herself from more working-class women and this in itself, as an indication of her self-perception and identity in terms of being "different" from these women, is notable. These women, while still on equal footing with their husbands within the marriage, nevertheless would not challenge them in any way:

> "they tried to <u>please</u> their husbands, if I could put it that way - if he didn't like it, they wouldn't do it."

Her own acquaintance with this behaviour came as a result of being "President of a really tough Sisterhood up in the Afan Valley". Is Ella's perception of the differences between her own behaviour and that of the working-class women in this study accurate? For one thing, she doesn't in fact differ strikingly in her own attitudes: she declares, for instance, that "man is the provider really, down through the ages" (i.e. as opposed to woman) and at the same time, women who choose a different role for themselves by not having children are asking for cancer: "if they had children, their glands would be working properly." Secondly, her judgement of the attitudes of these working women were perhaps a little too sweeping. Lil, for example, the wife of a tin worker, did mention that she would like to have worked but her husband hadn't wanted her to so

she didn't: "Because he was a good husband, I wouldn't go against him on that." However she added: "If I needed the money, that would have been a different thing. I would have gone against him." She also believes that she and her husband were equal partners in the marriage: "I had the biggest say I think!" In most other ways, however, despite her slightly elevated status, Ella's comments on and experience of old age are indistinguishable from those of the working-class women in this study. General themes which emerge in this study are picked up and echoed by Ella. For example, she comments on the decline in safety and well-being in this locality and observes what she considers to be a decline in morality and family values. Like other women she dismisses out of hand the possibility of sex outside of marriage and nor would she consider remarriage. Similarly, the biggest problem in old age she considers to be loneliness.[1]

Mr and Mrs J- are professional people, he a retired vicar, she having trained as a schoolteacher and one way in which they do differ from other working-class couples in this study (although not from Ella and her husband) is in their pleasurable anticipation of retirement: "We were looking forward to some spare time"; "It was enjoyable working together"(in the garden).

However, like other men in the study, labouring men who had defined themselves partly in terms of their physical capabilities all their lives, with the breakdown in Mr J-'s health has come a strong sentiment that he is "useless". Many other experiences of old age recounted by this couple are also echoed in other people's lives - the restrictive effect

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[1] These concerns will be echoed generally by other individuals in the course of this study.

of poor health, the decline in morality, the problem of loneliness - which would indicate indeed that while the few middle-class people in this study may indeed differ in some particular experience or attitude from the majority of people in this study, who are working-class, nevertheless in a great many areas of old age their experiences are similar. In this way at least old age may be described as a unifying and even levelling process.

Some people, born in the area, had moved away for a part of their lives, thereafter returning to these parts. One, Daro, had worked in the collieries in Birmingham briefly but had returned as a young man to Glynneath, in which locality he had lived and worked ever since. Another, Jack, moved to London for a large portion of his working life, with his wife, and then to Ireland, before returning to Wales on the advent of his retirement, claiming his wife wanted to return to her own people.

Three others were actually English. Bill was born in London but came to Glynneath in the 1930s and married a local woman. He worked in the collieries and drank in the working men's pubs in the area and to all intents and purposes lived a typical Valleys life. Howard, who married a Welsh woman, returned to Wales with her early on in their married life. Both Bill and Howard's concerns in old age reflect that of the other old men in this study - the decline in neighbourliness today, the great loss they experienced with the death of their wives, the physical and financial limitations old age places on them. Again, their assimilation into this society came in late youth, and included their marriages to local women and their taking up employment in the local seats of employment.

I believe that it does not detract from this study in any way to use the above individuals in illustrating my observations. To illustrate this further, I make reference here to the similarities in the old age experiences of Bill and his Crynant born and raised friend, Dai, made more clear on one occasion on which I interviewed them both together. The numerous similarities include their observations on the lack of neighbourliness today, as compared with earlier times, the ways in which they suffered from the deaths of their wives, and their acknowledgement of the limitations old age places on them. Dai said: "If my hip was better, I'd be splendid"; Bill echoed this, "It's only my legs - your legs go weary - you can't move them."

But Ivy's inclusion here is more problematic. She came to live in Pontneddfechan on her retirement in order to be near her daughter, who had long since settled in this area on the advent of her marriage. Ivy's son had also moved down to this area. I confess that I cite Ivy in this study, despite the fact that she has not really partaken of the culture of this locality, because she was very articulate, friendly and, with independent thoughts and interesting experiences behind her, made for fascinating listening. Again, she gives insight into experiences of old age which, being of a more general nature - bereavement, loneliness, denial of the fact that she is old - I feel she has a worthwhile contribution to make. But I have taken care to point out, where appropriate, during the occasions on which she appears, any ways in which she might differ from the rest of the group, ways in which she might throw what they say into relief because of her different experiences in youth and middle age.

2.3.7 Family Structure

The family structure existing for the greater part of the lives of the current old generation in this locality was not entirely nuclear, nor entirely extended. At some points in the lifecycle, the living unit could consist of several individuals related lineally as well as collaterally in either an upward or downward direction. At all points in the lifecycle contact and service-giving among the family, whether or not living under the same roof, was well maintained even over long distances. This kind of arrangement has been called the "modified extended family[2]", although over the period of the last two generations it appears to have become more fragmented in terms of living arrangements than it was previously[3].

During the period of the youth and early middle age of the current elderly generation the interdependence of the family unit in terms of living arrangements, with the fact of couples starting off married life in their parents' home, was acceptable and widespread. In the majority of cases, intergenerational living arrangements were practised along the female line, with daughters and sons-in-law living with female relatives of the wife, including her sisters. In exceptional cases, women went to live with members of the husband's family. This indicates the general importance of the female-lines in preserving family connections. Indeed, when studying the area of Morriston in 1965, Rosser and Harris (1965:13) described the mother as being "at the centre of the web of kinship" there. They saw the mother as fulfilling four basic roles: maintaining contact with kin; determining residence after marriage; providing the actual domestic care for an aged/infirm parent or parent-in-law; helping to look after a daughter's children while she continues working (Rosser and Harris, 1965).

Most of the elderly people I got to know did not think to question the intergenerational arrangement, although two individuals did not voice approval of it. One woman, who had gone to live with her mother-in-law, rather than her mother, had found the experience distressing. The other, Ella, felt the practice was associated with the working class. She said:

> "I would say we were good middle-class. I'm not being snobbish... but perhaps with people who weren't quite as well off, they would live with their parents, or they'd have rooms... I think it's much better for youngsters to start off on their own, if they can."

In fact, numerous studies have found that higher income increases the likelihood of solo living for all age groups. Of her own experience, she said that while she'd looked after her parents, they had lived separately from her, a little way up the road. She said:

> "I was torn between my mother, who wasn't a very strong woman, and bringing up Chris."

Her dilemma, while common for more recent generations, stands out as very unusual for the generation and locality in which she lived, in which the most common practice was for mothers to help daughters raise their children and in turn daughters would care for their mother when she grew old and again stands as an example of the ways in which the few middle-class people of this area stand apart from the working-class.

Today the intergenerational arrangement is rarer and more elderly people live alone than ever before. This is a trend observed for the whole country. As Wall points out, today seven out of every ten households with pensioners consist of pensioners living on their own. Up until at least 1924 under one-third of the working-class households containing elderly people were then confined to elderly people alone. He noticed an exception with the Lliw Valley - an area covered in this study - where, in 1971, it was

most likely that households would contain relatives beyond immediate family members, which does indicate the importance given to family ties in this locality (Wall, 1984). Again, according to Wall, Wales is one of the UK regions in which it is most likely to find households with pensioners which contain in addition at least two non-pensioners.

Both Gwyn Evans (1961) and Malcolm Fisk (1986) have noted the trend for three generation families to live together in these valley areas. Fisk makes the point that three-generation families were very common in the Valleys. To explain this he writes (p17):

> "... the processes of social change do not take place evenly and it is argued that family and social structures have changed less quickly in parts of Wales than elsewhere. Such reflects, in part, the lack of significant inmigration, thereby leaving familial and social networks intact, albeit depleted by the outmigration of the young and economically active..."

Evans' Onllwyn study (1938) points out how three-generation families have declined considerably in comparison to the situation two generations ago:

> "Where the grandparent is the house-owner, he or she remains to a varying degree the head of the household."

But otherwise,the grandparent is,"more in the position of a lodger." (p29/30). It must be repeated that it was not only family in the direct descent line that came to be included in the extended family system. Siblings were extremely important and continue to be so in old age for this generation, where younger siblings, who might once have come to live in the home of a married sister, now often carry out the function of carer to this older sibling.

Relationships with grandchildren are very important to elderly people and they exhibit the typically indulgent characteristics found in western societies. Elderly people often

describe it as a "relief" to be able to relate to their grandchildren in this way and to be free from the duty of disciplining them, as they were obliged to do with their own children. Grandparenthood for this generation came usually after their last child had left the home, but it did not come at a particularly early age. This was because marriage for this generation was commonly delayed until the woman was in her mid to late twenties, but at the same time family size was small - usually quite a bit smaller than the number of children born by their own mother - and children were spaced closely together. While their own offspring followed on the practice of smaller families they also appear to have married and started a family at an earlier age.

There may indeed be all manner of problems with relying on oral testimony, but as Thompson puts it,

> "In the field of family history... internal patterns of behaviour and relationships are generally inaccessible without oral evidence" (1978:134).

While examining the family structure in this part of the world, two aspects seem especially significant in the generation of the current elderly:-

i) The "mam"'s position in family life

The wife/mother, known as "mam", seems to have approached the standards of an ideal figure in the mentalities of this generation. Bereaved elderly men speak with sad reverence of the sacrifices the wife had made and the miraculous way in which she had made ends meet in oppressively hard times. Daniel's Gwladys, for instance, was not only the "best dressed woman in the valley", but also resourceful enough to get marrowbone

from the butcher's in the market, which was free - the butchers normally threw this away - to make their soup during times of unemployment.

Wyndham, recently moved into a residential home, wept as he talked about his mother who had died ten years ago. "I thought I had got over her death by now," he said.

There is no doubt that the mam worked as hard in the home as the male breadwinner did outside of it. The already onerous task she faced was intensified by the pride, sometimes verging on obsessiveness, with which she upheld her standards of cleanliness. One elderly woman explained it to me: "My pattern of life is to keep things clean" she said, and even in their old age more often than not I have observed houses kept as sparklingly clean and tidy as showpieces, belying the enormous effort made by the elderly housewife, in some cases involving a struggle against disability and sickness. Olive's paternal grandmother opened a shop after she was widowed and on top of that she always looked "spotlessly clean", her grand-daughter remembered.

Figures for the turn of the century (Jones, 1991) show that the mortality rate of women who worked in the home were higher than the men who worked in the pit, in direct contrast to national mortality trends.

Where, in a mining family, there were several working sons living at home as well as a husband the working day of the home could be extremely long. Baths and hot meals might have to be prepared for seven in the morning after the 11pm-7am night shift; at three in the afternoon following the 7am-3pm shift; and at llpm after the 3-11pm

afternoon shift. Or, if they all worked the same shift, duties would perhaps be multiplied fourfold.

Some of the working wives - those who are now in their late 70s or early 80s - carried out much of their duties before Nationalisation of the collieries in 1948, which brought in pithead showerbaths for the first time. Up to that time, lifting heavy steel tubs and boilers for bathing produced great physical strain in women and could lead to miscarriage or back problems.

John Huw described the way in which his wife fitted her routine around the working day.

> "The first thing my wife was doing for me was getting up with me in the morning and giving me breakfast to go to work. This was about 5.30 - to get to work by 6.30. When we came home from work, about 3 to 3.30, she'd make sure there was dinner. There had to be plenty of hot water. The water was heated on the coal fire. You had to fill a big boiler of water, then pour it into a sink bath and you'd bath in front of the fire. It was all prepared, the wife had to see to all that. There had to be clothes and towels ready for us too. Laundry was a big job too - there was only a scrubbing board then, no machines."

Sal, although the wife of a miner like her mother before her, enjoyed better conditions than her mother, due to the smallness of her family combined with the fact that she and her husband lived in a council house which had its own bathroom. She said:

> "My life was a lady's life compared to my mother's. I only had one child - she had eight."

Men without wives often relied on a landlady to prepare their hot water and laundry or, if he lived near his family, he continued to rely on his mother or sisters.

The wives of men who worked in the steel or tinworks similarly had to prepare hot water for the husband returning from his shift, but conditions were slightly better in that these

occupations were cleaner and shifts more regular than those encountered in mining. Their power within the home was not, however, echoed by their experienced outside it. Jones (1991) and Szurek (1985) point out the contradictory aspect of this. Szurek writes:

> On the one hand, in the sharply separate domain of the household women carved out a sphere of control, and to some extent protected themselves and their families there. While this is true to an extent, one can also argue that this control is chimerical; I concur with Frankenburg that the "..... power of women is a brief and small scale island of authority in a sea of ascriptive dependence....." (1985:198).

Again, however, one must remember that, whatever their position in wider society, men within the homes did not consider themselves to be "boss". Indeed, this is the subject of the next section.

ii) Husband-wife relationship

In this region, among the elderly generation, the husband-wife relationship has been characterised by equality and neither one nor the other partner wielded the "power". The macho attitudes pertaining to a working life associated with physical strength, in other words, did not spill over into home life. Both spouses were equal members of a team which ran the household. He went out to work and returned each day to a home which she had made ready for him. He brought in the pay which she then administered. Women would keep the money to buy provisions and pay bills and whatever was left over they would give as "pocket money" to their husbands. The emphasis on teamwork is revealed in the fact that there was room for flexibility of roles - in cases where the wife was working and the husband, because of invalidity, retirement or unemployment, was not, he would be prepared to carry out tasks otherwise designated as women's work. He would prepare meals, shop, peg out the washing. In old age, husbands are almost as

likely to hoover and cook as are their wives. Normally, however, women from the elderly generation did not work outside the home after marriage, in many cases their husbands preventing them where they had expressed an interest in going out to work. Where a few women had worked, generally they considered their job to have been secondary to that of their duty as a housewife. The team was perceived as comprising the man who went out to work and the woman who worked in the home and it was necessary for both to keep their side of the bargain. Within such parameters, both partners had considerable autonomy. For the wife, as well as administering the weekly finance, she was also responsible, virtually singlehandedly, for bringing up the children, seeing them clothed, fed and disciplined. Many elderly people report having seen very little of their fathers and unanimously agreed that the mother was more important than the father as far as the family was concerned.

It does appear that relations between husband and wife were by and large positive and fulfilling to both parties. Perhaps they both gained satisfaction from being part of a busy working team. But there seems to have been genuine mutual affection between them. While both had friends of their own sex with whom they socialised, they would also spend evenings in each other's company, either going to the pub together or staying at home and talking or playing cards, and there is widespread evidence of deep attachment particularly of husband to wife. I only came across two cases of bitterly unhappy marriages, in both of which cases the husband had suffered from alcoholism.

Evans (1961:31) notes "companionship has become a principal benefit sought from marriage" and sees the modern family becoming more egalitarian. He says there has also

been a change in the parent-child relationship, with affection becoming the substitute for the older ties of obedience (although the old people in this study recall their own parents with much affection, especially their mother but sometimes their father too. Vera, for example, lovingly related a vivid anecdote involving her father and how, excitedly telling him about her music lessons, she sloshed the water out of the tin bath she was preparing for him. If she'd mopped it up she would have missed the bus that was shortly leaving to take her to her weekly music lesson; so, despite fatigue after a day's work at the mines, Vera's father ushered her off saying he'd deal with the mess himself.)

2.4 Social institutions

Social institutions obviously played an important part in shaping the life of the community as elderly people knew it. They played a key role in integrating the structural elements of society as described above - whether in the form of husband, wife, kin or worker - into one coherent unity with a common identity. As Francis puts it,

> "The Valleys were synonymous with a particular kind of distinctive mono-culture: local, community, non-conformity (of many kinds), trade unionism, self-education, democracy and socialism". (1990:109)

2.4.1 Chapel and Church

To some extent, the values of chapel and church permeated community life. David Egan (1987:103) has written:

> "Many people who came to live in the valleys built their views and values largely on their religious beliefs and faith. The chapel helped them maintain and develop these in their new surroundings."

The church or chapel also provided them with their social life to a great extent- both in their youth and currently in their old age. C.C. Harris (1963:18) has written:

> "Settlement in the new industrial areas was on the village pattern, even if the villages were larger. The preservation of the small community assured the continued dominance of the chapel as the chief social institution within it."

Elsie, one of my key informants, told me:

> "I was brought up that I went to Chapel three times on a Sunday. I used to go to Sisterhood on a Monday, Bible Class on Tuesday, Christian Endeavour on Wednesday and the Prayer meeting on Thursday. That was my life, mammy and I..."

In their old age, there is still Mothers' Union and chapel or church on Sunday.

Historically, Chapel had always been the place to which ordinary lower-middle and working class people gravitated, while the Church in Wales was associated with the landowners, the Conservative Party and the anglicized middle-class. However, the distinction was not always so simple as the textbooks make out. Olive told me:

> "I used to go to the chapel when I was a child, and when I was 14 I went to Church. In those days, when we were young, there were many more young people in Church, you see - Chapel was more old people. So my friend and I decided we'd go to Church. We joined the choir - they had a nice choir there - and we went to church for the rest of our lives. The other thing was that they spoke English in Church, but most of the Chapels spoke Welsh."

Indeed, Welsh speaking is not widely found in this region at all. As is common when the grip on a local language has almost entirely been lost, individuals boast of a smattering of knowledge in order to fool the English visitor - "What do you have at breakfast?" I asked Daniel John. "Bara menyn" he replied, with a twinkle in his eye. Only a very tiny proportion of the elderly people I interviewed were bilingual and figures for Welsh speaking (Williams, 1985) show that the proportion in West Glamorgan speaking Welsh

declined from 43.5% in 1911 to 29% in 1951 and by 1961 had reached 26%. The figures today are roughly 15%. One woman, aged 84, told me that she'd only spoken Welsh up to the age of seven years when her parents moved down to the Valleys from West Wales. However, children taunting her in the street soon made her lose all desire to speak the language and now she claimed she'd forgotten every word of it. Daniel John, from Ynysmeudwy, had a similar experience:

> "I didn't speak one word of English until I was eight. When I went to school, the teacher asked me what my name was and I couldn't understand him."

Inability to attract the non-Welsh speaking population appears to have been a factor in the decline of the Chapel movement since World War One. Additional factors include: the inability to appeal to industrial centres, and the rise of socialism which did possess this appeal (Morgan, 1982), greater occupational mobility which lessened the value of the status positions it had to offer; the decline in family size and the establishment of Council housing which distributed the Welsh speakers evenly through the population making the establishment of new Chapels impossible (Harris, 1963). Also, of course, there is the human factor: the tendency to rebel against the things which one is forced to do. Mary, explaining her reasons for not going to church or chapel at this point in her life said,

> "because when we were small we were made to go to Sunday school and I think it grows from that."

Figures for 1949 (Brennan, Cooney, Pollins, 1954) - the period when most of my elderly informants would have been in their thirties and forties - show the five principle religious denominations in South West Wales, in ascending order, to be as follows: Congregationalists (Independents); Baptists; Church in Wales; Welsh Presbyterians; Wesleyan Methodists.

Indeed, while people of this area acknowledge the social usefulness of religion - providing places such as Sisterhood where one could meet up with one's contemporaries - it is on the generations that preceded theirs that religious values had their greatest impact. Mrs T-, for instance, was proud of how religious her grandmother had been. She told me:

> "My grandmother and grandfather Herbert were one of the best Christians in Resolven. On a Sunday there was no work done at all. On a Sunday they wouldn't wash a cup. On a Sunday, they would stack their crockery on a little bit of pantry, and on the Monday morning, the washing was done. The cooking was done on a Saturday in my grandmother Herbert's."

2.4.2 Politics

Membership of trade unions and commitment to the Labour Party was a steady feature of this locality throughout the central years of the century. The religious organisations remained strikingly detached from the whole area of employer-employee relations in industry and their influence became more and more inappropriate to many men. While tinplate and steel unions were organised before World War One, it was not until the 1920s and '30s that the anthracite coalfield miners succeeded in organising themselves in a comparably strong and vocal union. Many elderly men in conversation with me expressed fierce commitment to socialist ideas. This usually came to light in the context of discussing the lot of elderly people today in comparison with that of their parents' generation in old age. Daniel John said that today people in their old age have places to go - such as daycentres - and things to do. "Widows used only to have 10 shillings to live on." He ended:

> "They're 100% better off today because of the Labour Party. The Conservatives, especially Maggie, have taken us back over 20 years."

The Labour Party caught on proper in this part of the world in 1918 when it replaced the Liberals in most coalfield seats in the General Election. In the 1951 General Election, 70% of the votes cast in the 6 local constituencies were won by Labour (Brennan, Cooney, Pollins, 1954). This region continues to send predominantly Labour candidates to parliament.

2.5 The country of old age

2.5.1 Overview

It is important to emphasise that throughout this Chapter what I have been describing is not only the region of South West Wales, as you would see it with your own eyes if you visited, but the region as seen and experienced by its old people, especially those born around 1913 (allowing fifteen years either way.) It is their region and their community that we have concerned ourselves with here, in an attempt to understand the experience of being old through their eyes. Elderly people in any case have very little involvement in "mainstream" society - more so if they are in contact with family members of proceeding generations, less so if they have little or no family around them. They or their husbands are long since retired from the labour force. They very rarely go out to pubs or clubs, and daycentres are once-weekly occurrences during which the people they mix with are also elderly. For many of them, days are generally spent within the confines of their own home. Although some read a newspaper and almost all watch television these media portray a society on which they have a very tenuous hold. Although I don't wish to suggest for a minute that current political or economic affairs do not affect old

people, for that is far from being the case, yet certainly new ideas, new mores, new values do not generally wield much power over them, influence the mores by which they live, or invite much interest on their part. It is in this sense that I would describe them as inhabiting, more or less, a country of their own, possessing different attitudes,beliefs and ways of behaving which have been formed in the past and shaped by institutions- type of employment, Chapel, etc - which are no longer dominant or even barely extant in contemporary society. In this section I am concerned with describing the features of this "country" for old people living in South West Wales, and which can be seen as distinct from the society of those people in their thirties and forties who inhabit the same geographical location today.

2.5.2 The historical circumstances that shaped the lives of the elderly generation

People who reached maturity in the middle years of the century experienced social conditions very different from those existing today. The Welfare state was only established following the end of World War Two. The Social Security system and the National Health Service were established at this time also. Following World War Two a process of slum clearance and the building of public housing in the area around Swansea was begun, which may be said to have brought urban housing in this area into the twentieth century for the first time. People were only just beginning to own cars and washing machines, and TVs spread to Welsh homes from the mid-50s while only now did drinking clubs and bingo halls come to the mining villages. K.O.Morgan (1982:347) sees these changes as quenching the radical beliefs and attitudes found in Wales -

> "The valley towns, in particular, showed a more tranquil, anodyne appearance, as clubs and other entertainments claimed their patrons during the evenings and as adult males commuted long distances to work in trading estates or in factories in Swansea, Port Talbot, Cardiff, or Llanwern during the day."

Women began going out to work in occupations that were no longer stopgap, no longer filling in for the men who were off at war, but which actually relied on the section of the workforce represented by the women.

Educational opportunities were expanding in this area, which had always placed a high premium on education as offering the only opportunity to escape the fate of working in the heavy local industries. In the 1950s, the proportion of pupils attending grammar schools in Wales varied between 36% and 50%, accounting for the leap in social class, based on occupation, which occurred for many of the offspring of the current elderly generation, but which they themselves were not able to partake of.

In terms of ageing and old age itself many things have changed. Indeed, it is only within the lifetime of persons now 65 and over that the average life expectancy in this culture has shifted from forty to seventy years (see Klinefelter, 1984). Social care has been available to them and from the 1950s the services formerly carried out exclusively in the bosom of the family have also been performed by home helps, residential institutions and day centres.

2.5.3 The values of the elderly generation

a) Independence - personal and that of the family unit

This was a fiercely claimed quality among the people of this region and it signified the ability to look after oneself and to provide for one's family, while at the same time being a good friend and neighbour. Indeed, like in other closely knit communities, it is a value that throve within, not apart from, the family structure. Conditions at work may have particularly fostered this attitude among the men who were proud of being hard workers and boasted of working the salt out of their bodies. Women similarly had autonomy foisted upon them in terms of bringing up the children and running the home. In times of shortage, the family unit cleaved together and worked hard at making the little money go round, without asking anybody else for help. Women, as the financial managers, were extremely resourceful under these conditions and both men and women might skip a meal in order to feed their children.

Family solidarity, the self-help of the family unit and the avoidance of depending on the help of others, was another trait found in this region. Personal freedom, especially for women, existed only within a family structure. Several elderly unmarried women I got to know had spent their youth and middle age caring for an invalid parent at home, sometimes scarcely going out at all. Vera was one such woman and she told me:

> "There was one particular friend who lived in this street. She occasionally offered to stay with my mother for an hour or so, to give me a break, to go out... so I could go and have my hair cut and get tidy... Then another friend, who was an invalid herself nearly, she'd come on Sunday afternoon and sit with my mother so I could go to Church for that hour. That was the only break I ever had, and that was once a month."

It is perhaps no coincidence that two of the three elderly never-married women I got to know had been the eldest, or the oldest girl, of a large brood of children.

In other cases, girls brought their husbands home to live with their mothers, so that the close knit family support system could be prolonged for as long as possible. For some, the death of parents, or their own widowhood or divorce opened unexpected avenues of freedom - which could conversely be perceived as loneliness or emptiness - for the first time.

In their old age, this respect for the value of independence does not necessarily serve this generation well. The fear of being a burden on one's family especially is widespread in this region and creates a great deal of mental anguish for the elderly person. Relying for help on the state is often a preferred option, in that it is both impersonal and paid for out of taxes to which they feel they have contributed.

b) Values specific to men and women

Elderly men in this region, largely educated only up to the age of 12, have placed a great emphasis on physical strength and manual dexterity throughout their lives. They are ill prepared for the debilities that come with old age. Physical strength is still a means of self-expression and self-worth. In a residential home for the elderly I came across a couple of men who were great foes. They were both aged 84 and despite needing a walking frame to help him take his slow, unsteady steps the retired steelworker had threatened violence against his rival. "I can't walk but I'll get him one day" he assured me, vengefully. "I'll knock his block off when he's not looking." Parallel to the man's emphasis on physical strength has been the woman's zeal at keeping her side of the bargain in maintaining a clean and tidy home for as long as possible. Good housekeeping abilities have been cherished by wives throughout their lives. Elderly men,

in reminiscing, have frequently talked about their wives' abilities in this area - for example, John Huw:

> "I used to hand over my wage packet as I had it, unopened.And I do now [ie, his pension]. I never took a shilling out of it. She was a good housekeeper, an excellent housekeeper."

The loss of this ability is bitterly felt by many old women for whom it had been a central component of their self-identity and a prime source of self-worth. Indeed, the carrying out of domestic duties continues to instill a sense of meaning and value to the lives of old women. Such activities as dusting and cleaning become rituals, deriving their intrinsic purpose from the days when she was a young housewife or in service and part of a team, but retaining considerable power today when she is alone. When asked about how they spend their free time, many women chanted a litany of cleaning and tidying activities to me. Agnes' week consists of

> "Monday morning is doing the washing and ironing and cleaning. I do the Ewbank sometimes..Tuesday I'm down here [daycentre]. Wednesday I'm clearing up and all that... Thursday I go down to the hall for bingo...Friday's the only day I'm free."

And in her free time? She occupies herself "cleaning, dusting and polishing."

c) Morality

A strict moral code, which some observers have described as prudishness, has also been preserved by the elderly generation[4]. Loyalty and fidelity among the wives was deeply ingrained so much so that even the death of their husband cannot persuade most old women to break the habit of years and find another man. This is true for most elderly women I have spoken to. Elvira summed it up:

> "I never married again... Wouldn't think of it. I think it's disgusting. I wouldn't stand it.... I don't think its right. You take on a husband for life."

And beyond, it would seem. None of the women I interviewed had entertained the possibility of even a platonic male friend after marriage. There was no room in the social structure for anything but absolute devotion of wife to husband and family and social sanctions prevented such "dangerous" mingling of the sexes outside of marriage. Elvira said: "When you hear of someone pulling someone else - dear, dear, it'd kill me proper." Several women talked in terms of not being "allowed" male friends. Elsie said: "You couldn't just have a friend in the way you mean - that was impossible."

However, single-sex friendship worked to uphold the values held dear by society and was consequently encouraged throughout the lifecycle. Women would gather together in the day and look after their children together while men solidified their working friendship in the pubs and clubs in the evening. Time and again my respondents reiterated the importance of friendship to them and were very proud if they were able to claim a certain popularity among their own sex, and the possession of "plenty of friends." To some, friendship was elevated to a supremely high position in which it came higher in priority even than the necessity of earning a wage.

Daro was one such. He said he hadn't been sorry to retire in the least because "it was getting on top of me then..I was struggling to work, what with drinking in the night." The "boys" at work gave him a good send off, too. "I couldn't have been a bad boy, because when I did retire they had a do laid on for me in the Club, a dinner laid on." Widowhood often served to draw women once again into the society of female friendship, which was very similar to the society of girls that had existed before marriage in the place in which they grew up.

d) Religious beliefs

Most of the old people I spoke to had religious beliefs of one kind or another which definitely served in old age to give value and meaning to their lives and to guard against the fear of death. This widespread belief in religious values has been noted by other researchers working among elderly people (foł example, Reid, (1980)).

Elsie was able to reconcile herself to the loss of her own health and of her husband with her beliefs:

> "Oh yes, there's a purpose to it all. Somethings you bring on yourself through your own stupidity. But other things that happen: there is no other answer but that it was meant to be."

Jack feels:

> "All our lives have got meaning, haven't they?... I don't smoke, I don't drink. I've always tried to help people."

Vera, never-married, totally alone in her old age and housebound for several years, takes heart in her belief in a greater purpose.

> "Yes, I feel life has got some purpose. It's not what I want to do, it's what God expects of me. You have to think what God wants us to do. He must have had a plan, I think."

Olive, finding people - strangers in the street- prepared to carry her shopping and help her in a variety of unexpected ways, sees it as confirmation of her religious faith.

> "Oh yes. I feel there is someone looking after me. Because how do all these good things happen to me? It gives you faith doesn't it?"

Nor do they appear to fear the approach of death. They talked about it in a natural, undisturbed way, their personal and in some cases highly individualistic philosophies informing their expectations of the after-death period.

Edna, a woman of 89 who lived for her garden, told me:

> "I think of people as plants of the earth. I always compare myself with the daffodil. I've grown up, now I'm going back to the earth aren't I?"

Elsie, very much attached to her late husband, said,

> "I believe Bob will wait for me over there. He looked after me in life here and he'll wait for me the other side."

Olive said,

> "What's to fear? It's either something wonderful, or it's nothing at all. That's the way I look at it."

It may indeed be true that there is a cohort effect even with death; several old people referred to joining those that had gone before them, "Join the throng", their friends and family just ahead of them, having gone through the experience of death. It struck me that it may be a little like the feeling of the oldest year of pupils at a school, the year above having left and gone into the unimaginable wide world, and you next.

2.5.4 The experience of being old in a modern community

a) Isolation

There are two ways in which elderly people of this region suffer isolation. The first is in terms of physical separateness. Many elderly people I interviewed were living alone in what had once been the family home, before bereavement of the spouse and the event of children leaving home. 79% of the women I spoke to were living alone. As we have seen, the extended family which flourished in their own youths has now become more fragmented and families tend to live in nuclear units, in another village or the next town from their elderly parent. Functions once available to resident or neighbouring grandparents are now denied them - for example, the role of child minding is something

several grandmothers felt deprived of: Social Services have taken over a lot of these functions. Conversely, the dispersion of the extended family often results in the fact that one child - who lives nearest- has to suffer the burden of total responsibility for caring for an elderly parent, whereas formerly it would have been shared among several siblings. Relationships between elderly men and younger men have also been disrupted owing to the break in continuity of different generations working together in the same employ.

In addition to the dispersal of the extended family, another new factor in the experience of being old in this part of Wales is the reduction in family size, in which this generation were pioneers. A decline in fertility occurred from the current elderly generation downwards, leading to smaller families more closely spaced together. This trend is likely to continue: at the turn of the century there will be fewer women aged 65-74 than at present, but many more aged 75+ and, especially, aged 85+. Rosser and Harris (1965) have suggested some possible explanations for the plunge in family size that occurred in this region following World War One. One reason may have been that it was a period of great local economic uncertainty and industrial contraction and depression. Also the fact of having smaller families was a way of ensuring that children in a family could be given greater educational opportunities, the Welsh traditionally being very interested in education as a means to self-betterment. Rosser and Harris (1965) cite Tittmuss' figures showing that at the beginning of the twentieth century about half of all working class wives of over 40 years of age had borne between 7 and 15 children. Figures from the Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics for Wales as a whole, show 31.0 births per 1,000

population in 1900, 15.6 per 1,000 in 1934; 15.5 in 1954. The choice of large families did not always appear to be an attractive one. As one spinster told me:

> "Well I always said when I was a youngster that if I knew I was going to have as many children as my mother had, I'd never get married.And I think that stuck in me all my life."

For most elderly women this is the first time in their lives that they find themselves living alone. They talk of the six roomed houses they occupy and then go on to detail their faint hopes of a grandchild coming to live with them. Certainly, some enjoy the experience of not having to answer to anyone, but others feel this as loneliness and emptiness and see their lives as having lost a dimension of meaning. Lack of human contact can be a very distressing experience and Ella described to me how she was listening to someone and bent closer to her, putting her hands on her shoulder. The woman said:

> "Thankyou, Mrs P-. Nobody's put their hands on my shoulders for 20 years."

On the other hand, others find it hard to bear, through many years of its absence - Mary, for example, an 84 year-old spinster who finds it extremely distressing to tolerate the physical closeness of others even when it comes to receiving help, such as an arm to lean on as she steps down from the ambulance.

Although most people I studied who were actually living alone at the time did not claim to aspire to living with family, we cannot assume that this is the cause as opposed to the result of their living alone. They may simply have been responding to the fact that their presence was not wanted as such in the younger family home and that if it was there it may well have been considered burdensome.

The other way in which elderly people today may experience isolation is in the fact that they find it difficult to relate to the values held by succeeding generations; there is not the continuity that existed with the generations that came before them. They find it difficult to relate to the new moral code although several accept flexibility in husband-wife roles as far as going out to work and looking after the children are concerned, this tolerance being found especially among the men. There is some suspicion, mainly among women, as to the new opportunities open to young women today, particularly with respect to its repercussions on home life, which is one of the areas of life most highly regarded by them. Lil spoke for many when she said:

> "I think it's wrong...to me, then. I'm old-fashioned. The wife's place is in the home. Because you think all that's going on now - the children. It's young boys vandalising. I mean there's no home life now."

Mrs T- was astonished by the transformation of younger women's behaviour. She drew on a vivid example which illustrated the difference between past and present in her eyes.

> "Years ago in Resolven, there's a humpbacked bridge and all the men would be standing there smoking, so many men you'd be ashamed to pass it. Well now it's not the man it's the women standing there smoking."

Some old people see these changes, in combination with their own declining powers, in an exaggeratedly threatening manner. Bonnie said:

> "Mind, there was wickedness then, knocking on doors and running away. But it's not like that today. It's shooting all day, today."

A difficult world to negotiate, via the vehicle of their old frail bodies, becomes even more difficult and fearful, filled with menace and danger.

Dawson's Ashington villagers (1990) in old age see a breakdown in community life, just like the old people in this study - no neighbours, not recognising faces in the street as one used to - and a breakdown in law and order, meaning that Ashington is becoming a dangerous place to live in. All this contrasts with the situation in the past. Though it was agreed there was violence in the past, it was thought to be a different type of violence, (i.e. less so).

It has been suggested that many elderly people shelter themselves against these new values in order to feel that the rules by which they themselves played are not bereft of value and meaning. This attitude has been termed "moral siege" (Coleman, 1990) and describes a process whereby elderly people actively compare the past with the present, emphasising differences between the generations rather than similarities and giving a high moral estimation to old people and a low one to the young:

> "Accepting the values of modern society is tantamount to denying meaning to their own lives as they have led them" (Coleman, 1990:100).

Some researchers have identified this inability of elderly people to share the values of succeeding generations as the principal factor in creating a sense of loneliness or of social isolation in their lives, commenting on the fact that the old are "isolated" not because they lack the company of their children but because they are unable to share with them the same social and cultural beliefs (Rosser and Harris, 1965).

This is what Barbara Anderson (1972:211) was talking about when she identified the phenomenon of "deculturation" of the aged, whose lives are lived outside of and apart from the viable body of tradition that constitutes modern society, making them "a lost

generation, carriers of a defunct culture." In many cases it is not so much that they disapprove of these values for others as that they find them inappropriate for their own lives. Indeed, many values have changed and Dorothy Jerrome has listed these as sexual morality, duty, the importance of work, patriotism, authority, definition of family roles, among others (Jerrome, 1990). Other changes that have occurred include nationalisation, the growth of the Welfare state, the growth of mass media and increasing sophistication of technology.This works both ways, contributing to widening the distance between old and young. As J.B. Priestley wrote in his introduction to Gladys Elder's work (1977:10):

> "The point is that during the last twenty years or so we have largely stopped seeing our old people simply as Grannie or Grandpa, but almost as members of a strange species, not at all ourselves simply further along in life."

To a very young member of Agnes' family, her age at 88 somehow put her "outside" and "beyond" the cosy family to which he felt he belonged. She described a conversation her great grandson had with his mother in Agnes's presence. She described it as follows:

> "One of them said to his mother: "I don't want you to die and I don't want to die myself." She said: "Who's talking about dying?" He was crying pitiful! And then he turned to me and said: "Mind, she can go anytime - she's old."

b) Breakdown of small-scale communities and the diminishing of the activity of neighbouring

Peggy from Treboeth who had just moved into a residential home for the elderly had no neighbours to visit her at the Home. "In my street, they're all gone, they're all dead. I don't know anyone." Old people die and are replaced by new ones with different ideas about neighbouring. Essentially, "they're all working" as the old people said, and when

they drove home tired in the evenings they lacked the time, energy and inclination to perform the once traditional activities of the neighbour. Olive put this into words:

> "It used to be a very homely village, you'd be speaking to everyone. But I don't know, it's not the same as it used to be."

The Valleys have gone from being an open to a closed society. As Francis writes,

> It was very much a public and open society: long, tightly-packed streets making for neighbourliness and communal living; large male workforces with a strong union consciousness; massive ornate chapels, and workmens institutes with well-stocked libraries....." (Francis, 1990:109)

Indeed, the greatest symbol of this change in village life from being an open to a closes society is the symbol of the locked door - and the fact that people lock their doors today is something widely commented on among this generation.

But wherever a few old people remained settled in a street together, this process continued, comprising visits in and out of each other's houses all day, with trips to the shop, the pharmacy, the Post Office performed for the benefit of an older, frailer neighbour. Also, it is possible for some frail elderly people to remain in touch with their community - and their equally frail neighbours and friends - by drawing on the information source that is provided by home care in this locality. Mr J- informed me:

> "Another good thing is the carers. Cos they travel all over Glynneath and over the other side of the Valley -and they bring a lot of information for us - who've they met, etc. Cos there's a lot of people to whom they go - and I know them."

Elsie knew all about another old woman from her village whom I was going to visit. "Have you seen her recently, then?" I inquired, impressed at the depth of her knowledge of her peer's health and family news, even her appearance. "No, not for years, but the home help tells me." But the breakdown of neighbouring is an aspect of a larger structural pattern. Essentially, there has been a gradual breakdown of local communities

in which everyone knew everyone else because everyone worked at the same place and lived within doors of each other. With the closing of mines, steel and tinworks, people who live in this region today are obliged to commute into town. People no longer share the same occupations. The locality no longer looks inwards, with its focal point being the works, pub and chapel but many small towns and villages have largely become dormitory suburbs for the larger centres. This constitutes a vast change for elderly people of these parts. Even where the style of life had been relatively new in their youth, where they had moved down from rural parts of Wales with their parents, they had always built their lives in local communities characterised by a strong degree of social homogeneity and a sense of understanding the people among whom one lived.

Will, aged 90, tried to explain the difference between Clyne as it was when he was a young man and the village as it is today. He said:

> "We were all friends, all together, one family - 17 houses in a terrace and we were like one family. It's not like that today."

Certainly, the fact that son no longer follows father into the mines or metalworks has led to the diminishing of a sense of community, of continuity and mutual comprehension between the generations, and of the status elderly people once enjoyed.

K.O. Morgan (1982) has pointed out that South Wales, during the era of depression, remained very local. It was local institutions that loomed largest in recollections of the period. In the mid-1930s, it was calculated that there were 109 workmen's or welfare institutes in South Wales.

Several elderly people noticed this change reflected in the decline in the number of shops in their particular village. When I asked Vera if she thought Cwmgwrach had changed over the years she said,

> "This village is getting really derelict. I was just counting in my mind one night in bed how many shops we used to have. And I counted over 44. And now there's nothing now. Only three food shops."

Olive observed the same phenomenon in her village, Glynneath.

> "There's so many shops closed. Oh, the shops! We had every kind of shop! They're all gone. One day I sat down and I counted sixty shops I could remember from a child to now - gone."

c) Perceptions of being old

The experience of being old is one that elderly people confront with ambiguous feelings.

On the one hand, they think of it as a time of loss, when once vital, active, working men become "useless", when "you slow down" and "you can't get about as you used to" while "your scope narrows." On the other hand, they are proud of having acquired a certain amount of wisdom and experience, increasing self-confidence and the ability to speak out as they think, without worrying about the effect this may have on others. Edna said:

> "You can tell people straight what you think of them... when you're young, you're afraid to offend people...now I tell a person straight. You suddenly realise that no matter how important a man is, they're no different. It's only the air they acquire. They demand a certain amount of... but that wouldn't worry me. I cut through that now. I wouldn't care tuppence. I'm not shy or self-conscious about anything I do now."

In any case, a lot of people I got to know, including Ethel, felt that it was somehow sinful to complain and say they are unhappy being old, which reflects the religious background of this area.

The duality of attitudes towards old age represents in effect the contrasting attitudes of the elderly generation as compared to the succeeding generations. When elderly people were young they devoted much time , even giving up the possibility of a career or marriage, to looking after their elderly parents. Many of the women in my study married late, in their late 20s, the reason being a need to help elderly or sick parents. Biblical attitudes were more dominant in the society of this time, as was the influence of Chapel and Church, which obviously had an effect. But priorities have changed and the needs of elderly people are often considered to get in the way of the younger generations, to be holding them back, and services performed for them by family may be resented. While today's old people were willing to enter into close relationships with their elderly family members, and to make sacrifices for them, they recognize that values have changed, youth is venerated today, and the younger generations are not usually prepared to do for them what they have done for their elderly relatives. They fall between two stools, in a sense, and while they readily cared for older family members in their youth, today few younger people will care for them. In effect, old people have two images of old age in their head - the old and the new - which gives rise in many instances to conflicting attitudes towards themselves.

One of the most common manifestations of this centres on whether or not they should actually describe themselves as old. By and large, they are loathe to, because of the implications this stage of life carries with it. Ivy said about her children: "I don't want them to think that they've got to come and see me because I'm getting old." Howard believed that people become old only when "they give way." People in their eighties were very quick to describe themselves as middle-aged. In some respects, it seems, the

old people of today are being denied the old age that their parents were allowed before them. It is not that old age was more comfortable for their parents' generation - they acknowledge that it was not. But an old person could remain an integral and valuable member of society, or of a local community, in a way that is decreasingly possible today. Sal said:

> "There was more closeness in the family in those days than what it is today. Today, they're all out at bingo and things like that, aren't they? When my mother was sick we were there day and night with her but now - in the homes, isn't it? Out of the way. I wouldn't leave my mother to go in a home, oh no."

Some of the experiences of old age are timeless in their character, transcending historical period and place. One such is the inability to look forward any more and to plan, and I didn't find anyone willing to plan more than a week ahead. Constance said:

> "I'm coming to the end of the road, now, there's not a lot to look forward to - but I've got a wealth of memories to look back on. I still have a lot of things I'd like to do and I know I won't be able to do them but I can still - hope - I can still - <u>imagine</u> things happening. A lot of things I'd like to be done and I know I'll never get them done."

Another old lady told me that she only planned now for "a future life". This sets elderly people very much apart from younger generations, whose planning for time ahead is a great feature of their lives and indeed a principle on which society is run.

What I have attempted to do in this chapter is to describe the social and cultural conditions experienced by this particular generation of elderly people in this locality, those who are in their seventies and eighties in 1992, not <u>any</u> generation of elderly people. In so doing, I have tried to depict the way of life as they would have known it in their own childhood, youth and middle-age - the employment available, the nature of married life and family life, the values that held sway and the social institutions and

circumstances that shaped these values. I have also touched on the differences in the way of life that we see today, the changed lifestyles and values in the locality, all of which are shaping the kind of old age this generation are currently experiencing.

NOTES

1. Most of the decline in the South Wales coalfield took place 1960s, with 86 collieries closing between 1959 and 1970. (Rees and Rees, 1983)

2. For example, the urban development of Port Talbot includes Aberavon which although remaining distinct, merges with Sandfields and Taibach. Similarly Morriston and the old village of Cwmrhydyceirw have virtually merged.

3. Graham Allen has suggested "modified elementary family" as a more accurate description of Litwak's "modified extended family", sensibly it seems to me: see Allan (1985). This contrasts and is more satisfactory than the "extended family" which has been defined by Townsend as "A group of relatives, comprising more than an immediate family, who live in one, two or more households, usually in a single locality, and who see each other every day or nearly every day"(1957:108).

4. It should not be assumed that this fact works to the detriment of old people: i) this arrangement does not affect services provided to the extended family by its branches and ii) it may be the result of the fact that old people want to live alone and for the first time are able to afford financially to do so.

5. Diana Leonard (1980), says that during the period of her fieldwork in Swansea (1968-9), when London was "swinging", no sex education was permitted in Swansea schools, there was a lack of family planning facilities in the town and Swansea was the last university in England and Wales to give up sex-segregated halls of residence.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOCIAL NETWORKS[1] OF ELDERLY PEOPLE: ISOLATION OR INTEGRATION?

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the characteristics of the relationships old people of this area maintain with others, whether spouse, family, friends or neighbours, together with the ways in which they relate to wider society. It looks at the ways in which old people are integrated into social networks and involvements with the society around them by means of these relationships. It also examines the cases and circumstances in which such integration does not occur, in which instead the old person is thrown upon her/his own resources, marooned on the outer margins of society, so to speak and experiences a consequent sense of loneliness. By examining the old person's attitude towards mixing with others and going out to clubs and societies in the wider community, together with his or her attitudes towards modern day mores and social attitudes, one can glimpse the degree to which they feel a sense of belonging to, or else a sense of alienation from, society at large.

Taking a longitudinal approach, it examines the ways in which old people's relationships with others have changed over time, some growing stronger, some changing in significance and purpose, some becoming attenuated or vanishing altogether. It makes suggestions about which key relationships and involvements are more likely to engender a sense of "belonging" and of social satisfaction in the old person and which others may yet allow the old person to experience loneliness and a sense of marginalisation. It

examines the idea that it is the loss of one central, core relationship, usually through death, that is most likely to trigger loneliness in an old person, as he or she is detached and cut off from his/her major confidante, as well as central life-role, without the subsequent benefit of any new social role or involvements peculiar to this life-stage serving to bring them back into society.

Section 3.2 looks at the old person's interaction with family, comparing and contrasting the relationships with sons and daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, siblings and other relatives. It focuses on the subject of intergenerational living, differentiating those who found the experience satisfying and those who did not, finally eliciting the opinions of those who live alone as to whether living with family is a desirable situation, to which they aspire, or not.

Section 3.3 looks at interaction with friends and neighbours, differentiating women's friendships from men's friendships as they are seen to fulfil contrasting functions. It also looks at cross-sex friendships and when and if these take place. Finally, it compares and contrasts the function and significance of friends, neighbours and family in the lives of old people.

Section 3.4 focuses on the old person's interaction with the wider community and with younger people. It looks at self-perceptions of old people, taking this as a significant indicator of the way in which they relate to others, and in particular on the question of whether or not they see themselves to be old which, again, is often linked with sociability.

Section 3.5 takes as it subject the experience of loneliness and the different causes and perceptions of the experience. It makes suggestions as to the types and characteristics of old people who appear to be the most vulnerable to loneliness.

Finally, section 3.6 considers the experience of bereavement, which, although one of the causes of loneliness discussed in section 3.5, merits separate discussion on account of the fact that it appears to be the key cause of loneliness in old age. It looks at feelings of emptiness and isolation that are very common following bereavement and examines the extent to which old people are successful at reestablishing attachments and involvements with others.

3.2 Interaction with family

3.2.1 Relationships with sons and daughters

As we will see below, most old people in this study possessed son(s) or daughter(s) with whom it was possible to maintain a relationship, and most of the latter lived close enough for face-to-face contact. Where this was not possible, distance did not necessarily appear to be an impediment in the maintaining of close relationships. Close relationships - those most likely to produce a fulfilling sense of social involvement in the old person - were mostly carried on with daughters, who were far most active in the lives of the old people.

Of those elderly people who became my informants three-quarters had at least one child living, almost one-fifth had been married but were childless and one individual had outlived all her children.

For those who had children living, the great majority had at least one child who lived within visiting distance. 47% had at least one child living in the same or a nearby village, 22% had a child in a surrounding town, taking Cardiff as the furthest point here and 16% had no children living within practical visiting distance, while 16% lived in the same home as a child.

Relationships with children remained close in the majority of cases, even where children lived beyond reasonable drop-in distances. Where they lived close by, one or more children would drop in at least once a day in 58% of cases or one or more times a week in 42% of cases. As will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter, daughters were more involved in visiting than were sons, who were also more involved in practical help-giving activities towards their elderly parent(s).

Raymond, for example, had two daughters and a son. The two daughters lived nearby and one visited twice a day while the other called in every day. But the son, who lived in Leicester, maintained little contact with his parents and Raymond, shrugging, recalled that he'd never really seen eye-to-eye with his son and that since he'd been married he'd gone more and more towards his wife's parents.

Lil had a son and a daughter; her son visited once a week, while her daughter came every day. Her son's visit, moreover, was purely social, during which time he would spend the hour chatting to her over a cuppa. Her daughter's visit combined companionship with the carrying out of essential practical activities for her mother.

The help-giving dimension of this relationship will be considered in the following chapter. But it is useful to point out here that much of the character of the parent-offspring relationship in this locality is determined by the fact that daughters work part-time - and there is a vast army of middle-aged part-timers in this area of the country - whereas sons work full time, often on a shift system in one of the local industries. Sons, where they may not have the expectations, also do not have the opportunity, in the majority of cases, to maintain such active relationships with their parents. As Finch and Groves (1980) state, in practice, community care equals care by the family, and in practice care by the family equals care by women.

Indeed, one might feel that the present government has built its entire community care policy on the recognition that women are available to give support to elderly parents; while recognizing their availability as part-time workers has also played a part in keeping them there, in a sort of chicken-and-egg situation.

Indeed, In the White Paper: "Caring for People", presented to parliament in November 1989,we find the following statement:

> "... the reality is that most care is provided by family, friends and neighbours. The majority of carers take on these responsibilities willingly, but the Government recognises that many need help to be able to manage what can become a heavy burden... Helping carers to maintain their valuable contribution to the spectrum of care is both right and a sound investment. Help may take the form of providing advice and support as well as practical services such as day, domiciliary and respite care"(p9).

Many researchers have commented on the tendency for caring to be undertaken predominantly by women. A survey of carers by the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1979 (EOC,1982) found that there were three times as many women carers as men. Male helpers on the whole are husbands of elderly or disabled women and on average are older than female carers; women, on the other hand, have employment opportunities disrupted.

We can see this situation manifested in the case of Edith, whose daughter, working part-time as a home help, visited her mother twice a week, cleaning for her once weekly. She barely saw her son, however, for although living nearby he worked shifts seven nights a week in order to keep up mortgage payments.

On the other hand, Elwyn's sons, as headmasters, presented exceptions to this rule. They both lived in small towns nearby and were very attentive towards their father, calling in once a telephoning. One would take him for trips in the car while the other would do the shopping. Their middle-class status (even though Elwyn himself had been a collier and therefore working class) may have removed them from the traditional patterns of

inter-familial behaviour while Elwyn's lack of daughters added another impulse in this direction.

The general pattern, however, very much reflects the one existing in the generation that is now elderly, wherein girls stayed at home to help their mothers: a pivotal role played by females in the family (see Allen, 1992).

Research (eg Qureshi,1986) has found that the order of expectations for help among elderly people appear: spouse; daughter; daughter-in-law; son; other relatives and non-relatives, and it is for a combination of these factors described above, namely expectations in the elderly person's generation that women would give the help combined, with the practical realities of contemporary local society - women work part-time and men do not.

Dai "Butch" was pleasantly surprised by the degree of help and support given to him by his two daughters - one of whom lives next-door-but one in one direction and the other of whom who lives next-door-but-one in the other direction - following the death of his wife. He told me:

> "It was hard for me. I was thinking: on my own now. And nobody to look after me. But I was wrong, see. I had the daughters."

Capable of looking after himself, but still fearful of being a nuisance, he "tests" his daughters every so often.

> "I said: "I think I'll go to the homes." And she said- "You're not going to the homes." Then I said: "I'll go to a sheltered flat." "Don't you dare!" she said "You stop here. We're here.""

Indeed, in every respect daughters are far more interwoven into the daily lives of their elderly parents than are sons. Since the vast majority of my informants were women - 70% of the whole group, echoing the 67% of women making up the total number of individuals 75 and over in West Glamorgan as a whole - this may also reflect the characteristic pattern of friendship behaviour in this region, with female-female friendships being characterised by intimacy and durability, as will be described in a later section. Many elderly women, indeed, talked of their daughters in terms of the strong friendship that existed between them, frequently labelling one daughter their "best friend." They also talked of their own mothers in terms of strong friendship, which in some cases was built up as the result of shared domestic labour.

In Sal's case, in her youth she had helped her mother get the steel baths ready for her four collier brothers during the time she lived at home, and they had spent whole days washing or ironing together, or baking the bread and cake they needed as there were then no shops in the neighbourhood.

Matricentricity, as will be described in Chapter IV, as well as the source of this society's greatest attachments, can be said to be the principle on which the informal social system of the coalfield and steelworks country was run, in the time of the youth of the elderly generation, and it continues to be run in this way. Mothers and daughters continue to be the linchpin of this system but mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are brought in and grandmothers are accorded a special place in it. It has been pointed out, indeed, that the mother-daughter dyad is one of the two key dyads in western society, the other being the husband-wife combination (Bohannan, 1963).

Frequently women step in to help when men fail them - when they are on the dole or not earning enough.

When her husband was unemployed Sal and her husband did not suffer too much. She told me:

> "I was very lucky, between my mother-in-law and my mother. They helped us,"

with her mother helping more than her mother-in-law.

Mrs T-'s family was only saved from the effects of the irresponsibility of her father by the good sense of her grandmother. She said:

> "He was a good father in his own way but his mother spoilt him. There's one black sheep in every family, isn't there? He was a black sheep because he would enjoy himself. And he'd think everything was going on just the same whether he was working or not. My mother had five mouths to feed, though, didn't she? But on the other hand I had a good grandmother on my mother's side. My grandmother Herbert - she was a marvellous woman."

Similarly women berate themselves when they feel they have failed somewhat in nurturing that bond.

Nor do women have to be blood relatives in order to behave towards each other in the characteristic way, for the social role itself is powerful enough to trigger the involvements, practical and affective.

Mary married a widower several years her senior with a son and a daughter of his own. She herself had no children. Nevertheless she and her step-daughter soon began to follow the traditional patterns of behaviour established through the mother-daughter

link. Now in her old age, her step-daughter was in regular contact with her, telephoning her every day and going shopping every Friday with her. But she had no contact with her stepson at all. Here, without being biologically related, Mary and her step children slipped into the accustomed patterns of behaviour. Paul Bohannan (1963:55), describing kinship networks and kinship terminology in theoretical terms observed:

> "Adoption and other forms of "quasi-kinship" are made to serve as socially approved substitutes for the biological relationship, thereby merely underscoring its primacy."

Such was the case too for Mary R- and her quasi-grandmotherhood with the children of a neighbour:

> "If those children came home from school ill or anything, their mother out, to Mary R - they wanted to go, they didn't want to go to Gran Baker."

3.2.2 Intergenerational living

This may be considered as a special form of relationship with sons and daughters so merits attention at this juncture.

We have already established, in Chapter II, that intergenerational living occurs much less frequently today in this locality than it did previously. We have also briefly touched on the reasons for this - the improved financial circumstances of both the old and young generations, which renders separate living arrangements possible, and the changed ideology which champions independence for the younger generation and which tends to conceive of the family unit as the block of mother/father/child rather than the extended family comprising three or more generations. It also implicitly sanctions the loosening of bonds between descending generations.

It is interesting to compare the experience of intergenerational living as it occurred in the past with that of intergenerational living taking place today, using personal life histories as our means.

Evelyn's whole life illustrates the pattern of intergenerational living as viewed over the life cycle. Having been married to a vicar, and having lived with her mother for a short time after her marriage, on the event of her widowhood she moved into the home of her daughter - also married to a vicar - and lived there for eight years. She would wash up while her daughter cooked and she also took care of the cleaning and would look after her grandchildren while her daughter went out. She took great pleasure in being seen with her grand-children at the local park. But when Evelyn began to grow too old to be able to contribute to the running of this intergenerational arrangement in a positive way, she elected to move into a flat of her own. But she remained fully integrated into the life of her daughter. Now she was aged 84, her daughter visited every day, helping her to do anything that needed to be done. Grandchildren called in regularly and great-grandchildren stopped by on their way home from school.

Evelyn's life-cycle experience also reflects the change in values and attitudes towards intergenerational living over the recent years, moving from a close relationship involving sharing of a dwelling, to one in which she is set a little apart from the younger family,enjoying involvement combined with independence.

The elderly people I studied who experienced, or have experienced, intergenerational living, may be split into two camps: those who enjoyed the arrangement and achieved

from it some sense of satisfaction and those who did not. In chapter IV, we will look at the ways in which perceptions of personal dependence or independence affect the experience of old people in such a situation and any sense of satisfaction they may derive. In this chapter, I am more concerned to describe in broad terms the sort of experiences that are found, concentrating on the nature of the relationships that exist rather than their implications, as such.

i) Those who found the experience of intergenerational living an unsatisfactory one

Violet had given up her past and found that she had no future to go to. She felt a sense of displacement and limbo. Having moved into the home of her daughter and son-in-law, she had given up her old home, where she had lived since the 1930s, together with her old way of life and had not found a way of life to replace it. Having given up the position of head of her house, she had minimal influence in running her new home, and felt as if she no longer had a valuable function to perform. Her daughter and son-in-law had little time for her and she felt a sense of disconnection and alienation from this new way of life.

> "They're all working, see, and they come home and they've got more work to do. It's a different life altogether, see. As you get older, you want peace and quiet, don't you?"

Moreover, not only did moving into her daughter's mean that Violet gave up the headship of her household and her old way of life, it also meant that, to a large extent, she gave up her old friends and attachments. She complained that although she still saw her old friends if she went shopping, noone came to visit because of the fact that she didn't have a place of her own. Violet's intergenerational living, therefore, served to

isolate her in several respects, removing from her a valued social arena and a valued role as "head of the household".

Interestingly, her friend Agnes, who had chosen not to live with her own family but to be within easy reach of them in a sheltered flat, made this observation about Violet's situation:

> "Violet comes [to the day centre] twice a week now because she's not happy at home. But it was her fault for selling the house."

She added:

> "But at the time you don't know what to do. Her daughter was living in the council houses. Maybe she thought her mother would be without company, I don't know."

And yet there appeared to be no place for Violet in her daughter's life. Agnes' thoughts reflect the ambiguity which surrounds the issue of elderly parents living with younger family today, as will be explored further on in the chapter.

Occasionally, the experience of intergenerational living had been a satisfactory, fulfilling one but had broken down at some point, perhaps because of a petty argument which festered, or because of a personality clash; generally, in sum, involving a battle over power and occupation of the central position - who should be head of the house. This was the case with Edna, who had taken an active part in raising her grandchildren when her daughter and grandchildren came to live with her, in the cottage that she owned. Now her grandchildren had grown up and long moved out, but she and her daughter, who continued to live in the cottage,had ceased speaking to each other some years ago. The cottage was now divided into two self-contained areas, carefully arranged so that

neither she nor her daughter would accidentally chance upon one another or trespass into one another's lives.

Those who did not enjoy the experience of living with their families did not feel part of the family unit in the same way as those who enjoyed the experience, as we shall see below. They tended to feel neglected, "in the way", a burden, feeling acutely the loss of freedom and responsibility. It is quite likely that their children also felt uncomfortable with the arrangement which, in most cases, they had nevertheless initiated.

ii) Those who enjoyed the arrangement

In contrast, the following individuals felt they had a useful, vital place in the family unit; in many cases, indeed, they were the heads of a household that comprised members of a younger generation and still had a vital contribution to make to the running of the home. In many cases, the relationship was not, or at least had not begun as, a caring relationship but had preceded the need for any caring.[2]

In Emily's case, soon after she became a widow seventeen years ago her grand daughter came to stay, bringing her husband, and never left. Now the younger couple were buying Emily's council house for her. This arrangement suited Emily very well and it was one to which she had made a positive contribution. She said:

> "I don't think I'd like to be on my own, because I can't do anything for myself."

On the other hand, she provided the setting in which the caring relationship could take place, providing the younger generation with a home at the same time.

iii) Attitudes towards intergenerational living among those who live alone

It was not an arrangement which those who lived alone claimed they would wish to adopt: they preferred to live nearby but not with their children, to see their children often but not to live under their roofs, in an arrangement that has been identified and named "intimacy at a distance" (Rosenmayer and Kockeis,1963).

In some cases, previous experience of intergenerational living had turned the elderly person very much against this kind of arrangement. Lil, for example, had found the experience of living with her mother-in-law very difficult.

> "And I said then that when I had children and they'd grown up and married then they were going to be alone."

Others, who had been given a start on their own commencing with their own marriages, considered this a truly beneficial pattern of behaviour, and one perhaps more characteristic of the middle classes.

Violet, from Pontardawe, said she had no desire to live with her children

> "because I like my own way and they like theirs. We'd be fighting like mad."

She added, "I like them to live their own lives."

This sentiment coexists with a real attachment to their own homes, which must not be underestimated.

Elsie is adamant that "I wouldn't go from here", not into sheltered accommodation nor anywhere else. "I'll stay here with the key of the front door." Her husband had died two years previously and as she explains, "I'd rather live here with my memories. They're comforting."

Agnes similarly is attached to the sheltered home to which she moved eight years ago.

> "Yes. If I go anywhere, I want to go back to the flat. Marlene says: "Stay over tonight, mam. " No, I want to go back. The toilet is in the room and all, see. And I'm getting up in the night and looking out of the window - I'm a bad sleeper, can't sleep very well."

Jack was offered a room in a sheltered housing complex but chose not to go because he wouldn't have had the necessary space to bring with him treasured possessions such as his CD player and his electric organ.

Mary feels the same about the limitations of sheltered housing. She said: "I think you want more space. I've got quite a big house, see."

However, the question of whether or not one should move into the home of one's (usually female) offspring, when one becomes elderly, is highly contentious and characterised by a certain ambiguity. From the statements made by those who live alone, it is difficult to arrive at a conclusive and general understanding of attitudes among the elderly population as, in some cases, a negative statement could easily be serving to justify present circumstances. In Violet's case, for instance, while professing a wish that her children should be let alone to live their own lives, as she herself was self-sufficient, she confessed to feeling lonely and gloomy about her current life-stage. She told me:

"It's like this - your kids come in - they're there for 20 minutes - they go away and you're on your own. That's the part I don't like."

Later she said about the life stage she was at:

"I don't think its a very pleasant one. Its a lonely life, mind, because after they've all gone away, you're left on your own, aren't you?"

Clearly, many individuals were very uncomfortable living in the home of another family member. Those who did not enjoy a present intergenerational arrangement highlighted the difficulty and ambiguity inherent in the matter even more. The questions one must then ask are: why is such a decision made, such a move undertaken by the elderly person? On whose instigation, and why?

The general pattern seems to be that the offer is made by a married daughter and then accepted by the elderly parent, with some reservations. It would appear that both parties feel under some sort of pressure or obligation to enter into the agreement. Similarly, many of those who live alone are eager to explain that they have <u>had</u> the choice, they have been asked, but they have declined this offer out of their own volition. That is, that their position does not arise from neglect or indifference of offspring but from personal, positive choice. There is a difference between what they feel is right and "ought to be" - a state of happy intergenerational living, or at least the offer of it - and what they actually want in many cases - namely a preference for living alone. The conflict in part comes from the difference in practice of past generations - when extended families often lived together, usually without the choice of alternatives - and the present generation where, although a strong relationship may indeed be maintained throughout the extended family, especially down through the mother's side, nevertheless nuclear family units live mostly in separate dwellings.

Lopata (1971:54), in the course of her research on widows in the USA, identified this ambivalence with respect to living arrangements and observed that there remained in American society

> "a strong possibility that the older women of this generation are caught between cultural myths about past residential arrangements and the new view of appropriate lifestyles for widows."

Katie, a 79 year-old widow from Duffryn Cellwen, lived on her own and said that she preferred things this way. She recognized the fact that having her own place made certain that her friends would continue to call on her, and that she would retain her involvements with wider society and not suffer the fate of being cut off. She recognized too that things had been different in her parents' generation. Her mother had lived with Katie's younger married sister, because, as she explained,

> "My mother's pension wouldn't pay the rent even. She couldn't afford to live on her own. Her pension would go towards buying a bag of coal and something towards the food. We knew that's all she could do."

However, despite the improved financial circumstances for widows, Katie was at pains to make clear that her son-in-law had warmly invited her to live with them. When she went out to visit them in South Africa he said

> " "Don't go back.. stay with us. I've got a room for an aged parent." When I went back I heard from my daughter and she said:"Do you know, Bill was quite disappointed.""

Satisfied and encouraged by her awareness that she had been welcome in her daughter's home, Katie returned to resume her life, which involved living alone in her own bungalow.

The only individual who looked ahead to the prospect of intergenerational living did so in a vague and nonspecific way and, at the age of 86, nevertheless placed it in the dim and distant future. He would not be entering a residential home, he said,

> "because of my daughter and my grandchildren - they won't allow it. I don't mind. I think I'd rather go with my grandchildren because they understand my ways. And when you go in a Home, you don't know who you meet and they could be confused."

Nevertheless, he has at present no intention of leaving his home, which he had shared with his late wife for many years and to which he seemed very much attached.

3.2.3 Relationships with grand-children and great-grandchildren

Grandparents in this South Wales region generally appear to have a close and fulfilling relationship with their grandchildren. One reason why they take on this relationship with enthusiasm is that they are "grandparents in identity" as Lillian Troll (1980) has put it, having "finished" the role of parent- by and large having seen all their children grown up and married - before they partook of the experience of grandparenthood. Having done with the demands and difficulties of parenthood they are very ready to ease into the luxury of grandparenthood. They are the first generation to be in such a position. Many of my informants played a part - sometimes very significant - in the lives of their grandchildren as they were growing up, and the availability of shared time, together with a lack of responsibility for discipline, made for very satisfying relationships on both sides, characterised by informality, indulgence and pleasure.

0In a study of kinship systems, Paul Bohannan (1963:103) has commented on the grandparent-grandchild relationship in theoretical terms - what he calls in technical terms the secondary relationships between lineal kinsmen of alternate generations -

> "there are few relationships possible within the extended family in which so little tension is generated."

Other anthropologists have sought to account for the harmony of this relationship. Radcliffe Brown's (1952) suggestion that "friendly equality" between grandparents and grandchildren exists as a relieving reaction to the tension caused between parents and children by parental authority and by obligations each has towards the other seems particularly apposite. Nadel's (1951) theory that informality between grandfather and grandson is associated with lack of family authority by the grandfather does not seem to be of such relevance when it is observed that strong grandmotherly power, as associated with the powerful matriarchies we have seen in South Wales, is also associated with warm, friendly and non-authoritarian relationships with grandchildren - including cases where daughters are widows too.

In describing the difference between parenthood and grandparenthood, as they have experienced it, elderly people comment repeatedly on the greater availability of time for their grandchildren and the enjoyment which comes from not being called upon to mete out discipline.

Evelyn explained that she had enjoyed being a grandmother more than a mother because a mother has responsibility but "when you are a grandmother you can just love them."

Emily said: "I think you've got more patience with your grandchildren." She explained that when she had her own children, she was out working and when she returned home she was busy with housework, which was not true of her experience of being a grandmother.

Olwyn said:

> "You haven't got the responsibility of the children, so you can spoil them a little bit more, then if they go home and make a fuss it's gran's fault."

Many elderly people had derived huge satisfaction from their grandchildren while they were still very young. In fact, my observations could not support Clark and Anderson's (1967) view that the grandparent status appears to be "a largely inactive one" except with respect to duties and obligations, nor can they bear out Atchley's observation (1972) that the relationship does not bring continuing interaction into the lives of grandparents: on the contrary, grandparents are both actively and intricately involved in the lives of their grandchildren, as the following case studies will illustrate.

Sal said:

> "When your first grandchild is born then you can say that you woke up in heaven because you're so thrilled."

Her only son had four children and this added a completeness to the life of herself and her husband that had been lacking, filling it up with young children where previously there had only been one member of a younger generation (her son).

> "They'd come up on the Friday night and they'd be sleeping Friday night, Saturday night, Sunday night, and they'd go to school Monday morning,"

she said, proudly.

But some were able to retain and build on these strong relationships in the grandchild's adulthood. These are normally carried out without the intervention of the "bridging" generation, as the parental generation has been called (Hill, 1972), at least during the adulthood of the grandchildren, and without the need for their mediation by parents. Indeed, when the "bridge" is removed - for example, through death of a member of the second generation - it is possible for the first and third generations to communicate closely. They may even move closer together as a result of their mutual loss in a way that is deeply fulfilling for the elderly grand-parent.

Sal's relationships with her grandchildren became even stronger following the death of her only son, and not a day passed by without a visit from one of them.

With Edna too, although a serious quarrel had long since put an end to any interaction with her daughter, she enjoyed a strong relationship with her only grand-daughter. Edna said about her grand-daughter Diana: "There's something between us, very thick... like part of me." When Diana was a child she had enjoyed doing such things as helping her make saucepans out of plasticine around the kitchen table; now she enjoyed the times Diana visited her bringing shopping from Swansea, and the intervals she spent in Diana's home along with the latter's husband and small children.

Daniel John was particularly close to his grand-daughter, as illustrated by this anecdote.

Discussing his grand-daughter's husband he commented,

> "He's smart, mind, very smart. He's 6'3" and he's a black belt. And do you know what I told him? "If you put your hands on my grand-daughter, God help you!""

However, one point must be stressed here. Despite the great pleasure that relationships with their grandchildren accorded them, the tie with their own children appeared to be even stronger, even more significant, for good or ill. In cases where they saw more of their grandchildren than of their children, this basic truth remained.

Although Elsie's grandsons had been very important to her, when Elsie's daughter divorced the boys took her husband's "side". Elsie's daughter had now moved in with her and consequently the grandsons no longer visited. While Elsie regretted this loss of contact with the boys, she had no doubt of her own loyalties. She remarked to me, indeed, that there were certain aspects of her son-in-law's character which she now identified in her eldest grandson, and which displeased her greatly.

In Lorraine's case, the unhappiness she felt in her poor relationship with her daughters was partly mitigated by the good relationship she enjoyed with her eldest granddaughter, who had been "better to me than my two girls." However, while describing this relationship to me, Lorraine constantly referred back to her disappointment with her children such that it became apparent that this was her central concern.

Usually, however, elderly people saw their grandchildren less frequently than they did their children, seeing their children on average three to four times for each time they saw their grandchildren. Indeed, grandchildren often stepped in to fill the gap where children were 1) not close to their parents or 2) not available - eg on holiday, working shifts or 3) dead.

Relationships with great grandchildren - and it is increasingly common for families to consist of four generations - had less bearing on the lives of my informants. Mostly, they said they were "too old" and lacking in the energy to be with young children for any length of time.

Emily, for example, enjoyed seeing her seven grand-daughters but was unable to "mind" her great-grandchildren owing to poor health. "I can't move about," she told me. "I love to see them, mind." Members of the great grandparent generation tend to be very advanced in age by the time their great grandchildren are born and they can perform very few activities in the way of child care and baby sitting, which probably results in weaker bonds forming between them. The combination of advanced age with extreme youth is not normally a successful one and elderly people can find contact with their great grandchildren overwhelming, except in very small doses.

My elderly informants, indeed, appeared more interested in giving me a tally of the number of their great-grandchildren than in describing to me anything else about them. There is a sense of achievement in numbers. Elderly people glowed with pride to be able to tell me they had six or eight great grandchildren, although they had difficulty in recalling their names and ages, just as one woman happily related to me the fact that she had received 120 cards on her birthday, although it was doubtful if she could have remembered who they were from.

3.2.4 Relationship with siblings

Sibling relationships are particularly important to childless elderly people. They appear to be narrowly more important to single people than they are to childless widows, perhaps because single people over the years have established a pattern of life in which their siblings played important parts and were relied upon to fulfil functions, such as the giving of companionship, support and practical assistance, which otherwise may have been satisfied by a spouse and/or children. In old age, siblings are less important to those, either married or widowed, with children of their own, for then they rely most on their children and grandchildren. But although in such circumstances siblings maintain less frequent contact, they do tend to be spontaneously named when questions about their family are asked and they are then mentioned third after children and grandchildren.

Sister-sister appears to be the most significant bond, offering the greatest involvement,with brother-brother the weakest, highlighting the importance of female links in kinship relations (O'Bryant, 1988).

Where one sister is single and the other married or widowed with children, although their need for such a relationship may be unequal nevertheless a very strong sibling relationship is very often maintained.

This was the case with Phyllis and her married sister Joan. Joan's home consisted of her husband and her divorced son and was about five minutes' walk from Phyllis'. Joan would spend every afternoon with her sister and sometimes a large portion of the

evenings too, leaving when she had prepared Phyllis' bedtime Ovaltine and seen her into her nightie. Joan's visits were the highlight of Phyllis' day and if it hadn't been for the recent return of Joan's son to the home as Joan told me,"I know she would have loved to have come with me." Her son had "parted" (divorced) and in the school holidays his two children stayed with them. Otherwise, Phyllis could have lived there. But she felt obliged to keep the house open for them. Phyllis admitted wistfully,

> "I had a nice nine weeks there (after she came out of hospital). I didn't want to leave."

Indeed, relationships between sisters have been recognised as extremely beneficial for both parties. While the married sister can "lend" her husband and the stereotypical male assistance he provides, for example for driving the sisters around, as well as drawing her unmarried sister into a family environment for outings, holidays, celebrations, Sunday dinner, the latter provides her with a role model for singlehood in the event of her own widowhood and the promise of company and support at that time, a kind of insurance for the future.

I did not find that sibling relationships increased in significance in old age, as has been suggested by other researchers (Gold, 1989; Rosenberg and Anspach, 1973). Their importance seemed to be consistent throughout the lifespan, although their characteristics were usually subject to change. More specifically, in old age there was less actual visiting and more contact by telephone, less practical services rendered for each other.

Several of my informants testified to this. Eunice, for example, was an elderly widow with one brother and two sisters. She said she could not see her siblings very often owing

to the poor health of the four of them. She described them as "important to me - they're very dear to me" although looking back over her life she could discern

> "they're less helpful now. They're quite as important, they're quite as dear, but they can't help me as they used to."

She saw one or other sibling on average once a week and they had been particularly helpful during times of illness and hospitalisation. Otherwise, she was happy to be able to speak to them whenever she liked, on the telephone.

Katie said, about her relationship with her 82 year-old sister,

> "I don't drive and my leg is not good enough to go up in the bus. But we can phone each other."

Mary cited her younger sister Doris as the person with whom she enjoyed the closest relationship in her life. She explained:

> "She used to come to me always, her and her husband. You never knew when Doris would walk in. We used to go on holiday together, everything - she used to take me on holiday later in life."

But today, "now that she's got older and we're all going stiff, we can't visit."

But this sibling closeness and mutual involvement was not simply a feature of old age, in many cases it extended back over the life cycle.

For Elvira, her relationships with her thirteen brothers and sisters had been extremely important to her throughout the years, despite a crowded life involving marriage,

motherhood, grandmotherhood and many years' work as the landlady of a public house.

She explained:

> "When we were all married we all kept in touch.. and we used to go to my mother's perhaps every night."

When the thirteen brothers and sisters had their own children things changed in so much as

> "They live their life then, don't they? You don't interfere in their lives. You were still friendly, just as when we were single. But you wouldn't interfere in their way of life."

Agnes similarly enjoyed a very happy family life with her siblings continuing after their marriages. She said:

> "We'd all go down to my mother's at night. A house full. The grocer used to come on a Friday night with the groceries. And he used to say: "Well, it's a happy family isn't it? I look forward to coming here," he said."

Likewise, Daro, a retired collier who had never married, had lived with his unmarried sister all his life, and she had cooked for him and done his laundry and without her help it is doubtful whether he would have been able to keep his job.

3.2.5 Other relatives

Nieces and nephews were particularly important to those elderly people who did not have children of their own.

Minnie, a retired single woman with no children, named her niece as the most important person in her life. They didn't see each other much, but they telephoned each other

regularly. Minnie told me with pride that "she's a retired teacher, too" as if she were carrying on the family trade in a manner usually performed by a son or daughter.

Cousins too can be important to only children fulfilling the sibling role in a kind of horizontal substitution. As Willmott and Young (1960:58) observed in their London study,

> "childless people treat nieces and nephews as children and grandnieces and nephews as grandchildren. Single people without relatives make a kind of "family" with single friends as quasi-siblings."

Thus Vera, an only child, maintained a warm relationship with her cousin, who was the individual who cared for her beloved dog when she was taken into hospital with a stroke.

Olive had a similarly close and supportive relationship with her cousin who, at nine years her junior, she described as "my sister and my daughter". When Mary had a stroke, Olive's blood pressure went right up. "I cried all night, the night she had the stroke."

3.3 Interaction with friends and neighbours

3.3.1 Friends

Despite an involvement in large, extended families, friendships have been of great significance throughout the life cycle, especially for women, for whom friends could serve as companions in the transitions and rites of passage of life. Social activities were to a large extent divided on the basis of gender: football and drinking for the men, church-run activities and bingo for the women, and consonant with the strict segregation of male and female roles throughout the life cycle, as will be described in more depth in Chapter

V,women and men maintained very different patterns of friendship. We will consider female-female and male-male friendships separately, below.

i) Women's friendships

Friendships among females of this elderly generation have a strength and intensity and vivid significance for those who partake in them. They are quasi-familial but with unique characteristics generated from the experience of passing through significant life events in tandem:schooldays, first job, courting, engagement and so on. Female friends, in the experience of today's elderly, were capable of great attachment to each other, usually to a greater extent among pairs than among groups. But despite this great attachment - in a way that appears strange to the modern ear - married women called each other by their husband's name: "Mrs Thomas" or "Mrs Rees",etc, even where they had known each other since childhood. Agnes acknowledged the "peculiarity" of this:

> ""Mrs W-" she used to say,she never said "Agnes". But I do like people calling me Agnes, I don't mind at all!"

Indeed, many female friendships were made in the days of school and Sunday school and then maintained throughout life. There are reasons one can discern for their durability which arise directly from the social structure. Women of this area and this generation have lived very similar lives to all intents and purposes. Their domestic duties were determined by the occupation of their husbands and the great majority of women never moved more than 5-10 miles from the place where they had grown up, moving from village to village within one valley. It was exceptional for women to go out to work themselves, following marriage, and their social activities, centring around chapel or church, remained largely unaltered from girlhood.

One of Olive's closest friends was someone she had known from the age of 14 when they were schoolgirls together. She told me:

> "Oh, I used to have plenty of friends. One of my friends was a friend since she was a schoolgirl right up to the time she was found dead in bed three years ago. We used to do a lot of exchanging of books, because I've always been a terrible reader of books."

She explained that she went out of her way in early life to cultivate friends at clubs and meetings.

> "I had plenty of friends. I used to play tennis. I was in the Girl Guides. I joined everything you could. My mother wanted me to. I used to go to dances all around the Valleys here."

This was a pattern that she continued to follow in old age too. Describing her current social activities she said:

> "I like to go out - I go to the Whist drive on Fridays, I go to the Mother's Union on Tuesday, I go to the Old Age on Wednesdays. I go to the W.I. once a month. I enjoy every minute."

And for Bonnie - when she moved to the new sheltered homes complex in Birchgrove, several of her old friends from the village moved here around the same time. She told me:

> "My friend up the top here - we lived 22 years next door to each other. She came up here a 12 month before me."

Right through to old age, the pattern of these women's lives remained closely alike and where formerly women had lived in the next street or up the road today they lived on the next floor or next door[3].

Eunice's experience demonstrates the effect that moving in search of work for the husband could have on women's friendships. She told me that most of her friends were in Clydach, rather than in Neath where she currently lived following a move some years ago. Those were the women she considered her friends - made at school and in the early days of church going. She saw her friends from time to time - rarely now - and so came to rely on her neighbours for any assistance or minor companionship in the daily course of things. Lil lost her friends after she got married, even over a relatively small distance. She told me:

> "I lived in Aberavon till I got married. And then I went to Taibach to live and I lost all of them."

The distinction between friends and neighbours, indeed, is an important one and one which will be examined in greater depth later in this chapter. Among my informants it was the women who did not work outside the home, particularly where they had remained settled in their neighbourhood for a very long time, or perhaps had never moved from it, who saw their friends and neighbours as one and the same.

Ethel was one who had lived in her house for some forty years and whose strong identity was as a wife and housewife. Ethel's best-friend was her next-door-neighbour.

But where women had been heartily involved in activities outside the home - paid work or voluntary works, church or chapel and clubs- then their friends and neighbours tended to be distinct. This did not mean that their neighbours could not also be friends and, indeed, they often were. But in conversation with me my informants were nevertheless able to distinguish them from other friends who were "purely" friends and not at the

same time neighbours. Their friends were people who shared the same interests as themselves.

Constance had met her friends through work she had done for them as a seamstress. She told me:

> "Wherever I go now I find someone who knows me. We stop and have a chat."

Constance did not at the same time choose to befriend her neighbours, indicating perhaps the dual need for involvements and for privacy that in old age in particular are not so easy to combine. She explained that she liked to preserve a distance from them, to keep herself to herself.

Minnie, a retired schoolmistress, also enjoyed the experience of being recognised in the street. Old pupils of hers accost her in the street as "Miss L-". She doesn't recognize them, but they recognize her. "They say I haven't changed much. But I don't know...."

Both Minnie's career as a teacher and her involvement with various clubs and societies had opened up vast new hunting grounds for the establishment of friendships. She kept in touch with these friends following retirement and had also, following retirement, begun to attend daycentres, church and Age Concern. "Oh, I love people," she said, and attributed to her involvements the fact that she had experienced neither boredom nor depression following the death of her siblings.

Ella made friends through her involvement with the WVS and her interest in Spiritualism - she was a "healer"- which she cultivated while her husband was alive, but

more so following his death. Her neighbours, while friendly, were generally not aware of this side of her.

Margaret's enjoyment of singing had brought her out of her home and into a new society where she cultivated several friendships. Now aged 90, she kept up these friendships whenever she was able to attend a concert. But her attitude towards her neighbours was altogether more reserved. She told me:

> "They don't come in the house a lot, because we've never been used to it, having people in the house, unless they had a business."

In old age, activities carried out with female friends include visiting, shopping together, going out for dinner, going on daytrips or weekends away or on OAP holidays, sometimes substituting for the loss of the husband.For Rosina, the friends she possessed who were not also her neighbours were friends she had made at the daycentre near her home and the Disabled Centre. Her other friends she had made at school and during the time she was in Hospital.

In old age,friends are cultivated in Clubs, at whist drives and daycentres, to add to the friends that have been retained from childhood and youth. These centres, in providing a pool of potential friends for elderly people, make it possible for them to reverse the tendency, at this time of life, for friends simply to be lost at a steadily accelerating rate[4].

Agnes said: "At my age, everybody's got their friends, see," which rendered it difficult to find another friend when one dies. The desire to make new friends seems to decline for many also. As Agnes said:

> "I can't walk a lot. So what's the point of having new friends if they go on trips and I can't follow them? And I'm not going to be depending on anyone now. No,no."

Olive agreed that it was hard to make friends in old age, even though at 88 her desire to socialise had not abated one jot. She said:

> "Yes, it is hard.. because some old people, they don't want to go out, they just want to sit by the fire all the time, you know! It's difficult to find friends you can go around with. They've got disabilities, you see, haven't they?"

Because Olive continued to like to go out, she quite often ended up by going with younger people.Friends made in old age cannot perhaps replace the old friendswho have died perhaps because these old friends have for many years served as integrating links with the individual's own past. But they can become very close, treasured companions. They can help pass away the lonely nights in talking about old times together, about their children and grandchildren. They understand what it is to slow down, to have aches and pains, to lose your husband, to be approaching death yourself.

There are certain circumstances and certain times in the life cycle when women turn to friendship as an activity and cultivate friends more than at other times. Remaining single is an incentive to developing and maintaining friendships with other women; being bereaved is another. Following a crisis like bereavement, many women tend to throw themselves into their friendships, renewing relationships that perhaps they had less time for as married women, as well as attempting to extend their social network. The ability to maintain friendships has been cited as a factor aiding women to cope with the losses brought about by old age (Hess,1979).

For Olive, following the death of her husband she started to go out on a Saturday with one friend whom she had known since school for tea and a walk. Sometimes they would have picnics and go for a "little run" up the Brecon Beacons - an activity which Olive had no time for during the nine years in which she was nursing her invalid husband.

Rosina had been accustomed to going on holiday to Blackpool with her husband but following his death she started to go with a female friend instead.

Emily said:

> "I took up with my friends, then, after. We used to go on holidays... I'd known a couple of them for years, they used to live by us. I didn't have so much time to see them when I was married. And I was with them, I used to enjoy myself with them. But still the "miss" was there, but you got used to it and you had to live with it, sort of thing."

Their friendships with other women appeared to give older women significant pleasure. Olive told me that the people at the Old Age Club she attended were like "one happy family". This indeed illustrates the fact that, as partners and close family die, it is possible to substitute for them by moving outwards along one's social circle - to more distant relatives, friends and family, rather like the layers of an onion.

By and large friends shared the same circumstances and had reached a similar point in the life cycle (Hess, 1979). They were, consequently, able to give each other strength and support based on understanding and empathy and their concerns, reflected in their topics of conversation, were the same. This is a principle reason why same-age living environments - particularly sheltered flats - prove to be such fruitful places for the

establishing of close friendships[5]. People, in very much the same circumstances, and at the same point in their lives, are thrown together, in the majority of cases without the concerns of married life or work to impede the process of socialising with one another. Indeed, a previous study has indicated that age-segregated housing often provides the motivation to make new friends (Adams,1985/6), and there is no evidence in this study of disengagement or social withdrawal among elderly people living in sheltered homes. Many elderly people have no experience of living alone as usually they left home only with marriage and were usually also part of a large family. Living in a sheltered homes environment provides them with an environment which is quasi-familial and supportive. This is particularly beneficial perhaps for those people who have no family ties at this stage of their lives and can create new "family" ties.

Bonnie enjoyed the fact that all her neighbours were old like herself and enjoyed discussing the same topics of conversation. One of these was death - often a taboo subject where older people are surrounded by younger people. She said:

> "We all talk about it up here. Betty comes down. Then we say - they'll be burning us."

Those who had failed to keep their friendships going, who had allowed these to lapse during the period when they were preoccupied with their family, often regretted this following the event of widowhood. Unlike those elderly women who had fostered friendships throughout their lives, these women found themselves without a ready-made support network to see them through this crisis. This applied to women with daughters as well as those without since elderly widows appear to find it very beneficial to receive

the companionship of their peers, many of whom have experienced the event of widowhood themselves and can therefore act as "models" for the newly bereaved woman.

Lorraine had not cultivated friends of her own during the time of her marriage, but felt their absence keenly when she became a widow. She told me, regretfully,

> "I'd advise anybody to have a friend apart from the marriage. We done everything together"

(that is, her and her husband).

When I interviewed Grace she had been a widow for 12 years, but did not have any friends to alleviate her biting loneliness. She explained that the reason she lacked friends was because she was not accustomed to doing anything except as part of a couple. Since the death of her husband she hadn't mixed at all. I met her at a daycentre where she was sitting on the edge of a group and not actually talking to anyone. She told me that she felt very tense when she was talking to people and indeed I observed how she swallowed with anxiety and nervousness throughout our conversation.

Not all female friendships are among women who share similar characteristics in terms of age, marital status and so on. Other friendships are what may be described as "helping" friendships in which one of a pair of female friends - usually younger and fitter - bestows help usually in the form of practical assistance on the other - older and frailer[6]. Usually, these friendships are among women who live very close by, and so the women could be described as neighbours as well as friends.This kind of relationship will be described in greater depth in the chapter that follows, which examines helping relationships characterized by a degree of dependency. In this chapter it will suffice to

set out some examples of these relationships in so far as they constitute another type of friendship.

In Menna's case a more mobile friend passed by her window every day to check that the light was on and that the curtains were open or closed as they should be and this gave Menna a great sense of security and peace of mind. Also, she told me with pride that a young friend had baked cakes for her at Christmas.

Mrs T-, who was in her 70s, described to me how friends of hers, who were in their 60s, were able to do her shopping for her.

Phyllis has entered into such relationships since she became ill - but she says the women who have been coming to help her since her illness are not "real friends", thus distinguishing them from friendships which existed prior to her need for assistance.

> "They're not really friends - they live in the street - they've been calling in since I was ill."

She said about one such woman, Dottie,

> "She's not really a friend, but she'd break her neck for me. Give her good points. She's a woman I never really bothered with much before."

Mention has been made previously of the fact of losing one's friends through death. Consider the - commonplace - tragedy of being 88 and the <u>last one alive</u> of all the people you have known and cared about. Indeed, an intrinsic element of the experience of friendships in old age is that of death. Whenever elderly people have described to me the event of a friend dying they have done so in a direct and simple way preferring to

use the words "death" and "die" rather than the euphemisms employed by younger people such as "passed away". I was aware of the emotions that stirred in me in response to their narratives. Embarrassment at the unaffected way the topic was brought up, distress, an almost prurient curiosity which made it resoundingly clear that here we were dealing with a subject that was normally outside the bounds of polite social conversation. Only among my elderly informants themselves did the taboo appear to hold no dominion. There was no avoidance of the subject of death and no attempt to judge, draw conclusions or philosophize in abstract or religious terms; accounts were presented to me - without my actually having to solicit them - in a clear, unembellished way. They were described in the same manner as the accounts of things done with this friend during the time she was alive. This way of talking about death is appreciated in others too. One 90 year-old woman talked with approval of her, now deceased, friend's light-hearted approach to death:

> "And Mrs A- said to my daughter, "Pat, you know when I pop off?" - that's the way she used to talk, she was comical ..."

Looking at earlier parts of the lifespan I can see parallels in the accounts of young people describing how they lost their best friends when the friend's parents moved away from the area or selected for her a different high school.

Often, the actual event of death is described. In these accounts, little details can sometimes assume great symbolic significance. Agnes described the death of her friend as it took place during a trip with the Old Age Club. When her friend was taken sick and the doctor came to examine her, he gave the woman's handbag and glasses to

Agnes. When she finished her tale Agnes said to me: "She died before morning and I still had her handbag and her glasses."

The consequence for the friend left behind are frequently discussed. For Agnes, for example, the immediate consequence of the death of her friend was that she didn't want to return to the club coach.

> "I said:"They'll all be asking me now "Where's Mrs E-?""

She has not been able to face the idea of going on the summer trip since then. In the long term, the loss of her friend has left a space in her life which she has been unable to fill. Living in sheltered accommodation close to each other meant that Agnes did not have to walk home alone in the nights - otherwise she might not have gone to visit her friend so often. Her poor eyesight makes reading impossible and watching the TV difficult. So now her visits to her friend have been replaced by "nothing. Just sitting down." In another instance, an old woman indicated the significance of friendships by explaining how, before she died, her friend Mrs S- had taken care to wrap up the talcum powder - she always gave talcum powder at Christmas to her six close neighbours - as a sort of parting gift (she died in June). Mrs S-'s daughter had been left strict instructions by her mother to distribute these gifts. To Annie, she also gave a box of expensive soaps, saying: "You can have these as well, you've been so good to my mother" - a fact which Annie related to me with pride. Indeed, very little research has been carried out on the consequences of the death of friends with regard to the willingness of elderly people to make new friends. For elderly people in this locality, given the erosion of beliefs and values they have experienced in recent years, as discussed in Chapter II, the death of friends and family represents the final stage in the process in

which they have seen their communities disintegrate. Again, ties between individuals, particularly age peers one would suggest, are one of the few opportunities for continuity and stability available to the old person.

One would suspect that one of the reasons elderly people are reluctant to make new friends in old age is that the experience of losing a friend to death is one they are loath to face again.Some writers believe that women's capacity to involve themselves in intense relationships may make them more vulnerable in old age - when friends die it may constitute significant stress. But others suggest that women's capacity for making new relationships throughout life makes them better off in comparison to men who are less likely to replace lost friends (Jerrome,1990).

In any case, there is generally a recognition that whether one wishes to go on making friends or not, one's supply of friends gradually becomes smaller and smaller. As Mrs T- said:

> "Life gets smaller, doesn't it? The circle's getting smaller as you're getting older."

It can be a frightening experience, as articulated by Mrs J-, who said:

> "As you get older, you experience people leaving you one by one. You feel you are on the frontline now."

It must not be assumed from this that it is impossible for the old person to engage in new friendships after a certain age. We are not saying here - for that indeed would come dangerously close to accepting stereotypical notions of old people - that they are inflexible or set in their ways. We are merely saying that the opportunity to make new friends is less. Where an opportunity does exist, an old person might very well take it -

depending on her degree of sociability, as applies to any other age group. Olive, aged 89, assured me that her old friends who die don't tend to put her off making new ones:

> "No, not really. I have made a few nice friends: Mr and Mrs B- - I've only known them about a year. If her daughter brings her some very nice gateau, here she comes over with a slice for me, you know?"

But she was prepared to qualify her enthusiasm at this point, continuing,

> "But they're not like your childhood friends. And I had so many and they were all living around here and I could walk in any time and walk out. Oh, dear, dear, I miss them."

Olive is at least partly alluding to the fact that such longstanding relationships are a means of integrating past and present in an individual's life. In old age especially, it is extremely significant that another individual has been a witness to important events in your life history, that you are known to be a person, not just an old person; that you are known to have been a child and a young woman, not just an old white-haired woman with spectacles and a stick. Thus, in some ways bereavement is the loss through death of part of oneself, and not just of a significant other.

One final aspect of the experience of friendship among women of this generation that should be mentioned here is the extent to which relationships between mothers and daughters often take on similarities to friendship relationships. The strength of the mother-daughter tie in western society in the working class and in the Valley regions of South Wales has been observed by many researchers. Elderly women have described the experience of having very close relationships with their own mothers and then, in turn, with their daughters. As we have seen earlier in the chapter these relationships are characterised by a strong element of help-giving, frequent visiting or in some cases intergenerational living. Throughout the life cycle mothers and daughters "go about"

together, shopping in one of the main shopping centres during the day while the men are out at work, perhaps going to the pictures together in the evenings, making up a threesome with mother, daughter and son-in-law. Where grandchildren are involved, the relationship between grandmother and mother remains strong and central, and as if to underscore this fact we frequently find grandchildren brought up to call their grandmother "mam".

Sal said about her son:

> "He was closer to my mother than to anybody. He never called me "mam", not till after my mother died. He used to call me "Sal"."

For Agnes, this extended to the third generation, but not down to the fourth. She told me:

> "My grandchildren call me "mam" but not the great grandchildren. The great grandchildren call me "mamgi"."

Sal was also very close to her own mother and when her mother died she said she felt

> "as if I'd lost the world. Cos my mother and I, we were very,very close owing to the fact I was the oldest daughter and she used to rely on me. We went everywhere together."

ii) Men's friendship

Elderly men do not and have not had friends in the way that women have friends; they have had workmates. Building up a strong camaraderie with colleagues in the mines or metalworks, during their working days, in the evenings a common pattern was to meet up with these colleagues in the pub or working men's club, on an average of about two or three times a week and thus friendships for men were a mechanism for integrating them into the working culture. Thus their team member in the days became their

drinking partner in the nights. Men of this locality derived such enjoyment from this activity that sometimes it led to contention with their wives.

Dai Butch told me:

> "To be honest, I used to go out on a Tuesday, Thursday, Friday - on my own, with the other chaps. Drinking. And she was in a sweat over it. And she was right enough. I carried on for about three years like that. And playing football on a Saturday. Then we'd arrange to meet the girls in Neath. And many a night we wouldn't turn up. Let's be honest, I didn't play the game with her for three years."

However, a notable feature of men's friendships with other men is that, although solid, reliable and companionable, they nevertheless possess a superficial quality, merely skimming the surface of intimacy. Many of my male informants told me that the only person they could really talk to was their wife. The environment in which male-male friendships were conducted and the activities around which they were centred - mainly drinking and sport - did not provide a suitable atmosphere for the exchange of confidences, intimacies and deeper feelings. Nor were the values of the club, pub or sports ground aligned with the conducting of this sort of friendship [7]. Married men therefore looked on their wife as their principle friend for intimacy and confidences and "the boys", although very important, served an altogether different function. It must be added that this particular kind of friendship, while adequate for men's ordinary needs, appears not to be sustaining or supportive enough for times of crisis - ill health or invalidity, death of one's wife.

Howard explained that the only male friend he had had in his life was when he was a boy of about eleven years old. He and Gilbert had done everything together- rowing on the lake, riding their bicycles and later motorbikes, talking. Later Howard married and

subsequently the only "friend" he confided in was his wife. The men he met through work and drank with in bars were "not real friends" he said, so acknowledging the difference in the quality of the relationships he had with them as compared to that with his wife.

Olive, whose husband himself was a policeman, said that her husband "used to invite all the young policemen to supper or to tea every Sunday." Other people he invited over would make up a couple with him and Olive:

> "We used to have one policeman and his wife coming to the house every fortnight and we'd have a game of whist. And they'd bring their little boy and he'd sleep on the settee. And the mother-in-law! She'd chat to my mother."

Dai "Butch" too enjoyed weekday evenings spent in the company of another couple. He said:

> "We used to have friends come here and we'd be talking till 3 o'clock in the morning. Weekends and the week sometimes. Then we'd go over to my friend's house and we might stop there till 2 o'clock. Oh, I enjoyed that, I enjoyed that!"[8]

It is interesting to note that friendships in boyhood can share much of the quality of female-female friendships. In infants school, small boys up to the age of seven or eight can frequently be seen in the playground holding hands. But this sort of friendship, unlike its female counterpart, is very quickly discarded.

In adulthood, many elderly men reminiscing told me that they didn't often go out in the evening with the boys but preferred to stay at home with the wife. Attachment to their wife is not very surprising given an upbringing in this region which placed a lot of stress on the role of the mother and the power of the matriarchy. Thus men had been

accustomed to female companionship since childhood and continued to rely upon it and to enjoy it in adulthood.

Elwyn said he preferred to stay at home in the evenings telling me "I'm a home bird, see. I love my home." In his case, a warm family life encouraged his home bird tendencies.

Another reason why men may choose not to go out in the evenings with the other men is because they don't drink. Little entertaining at home is done, little visiting is carried out and meeting points such as the public house or club are vital in the social lives of the men. Those who do not drink are more likely to stay at home in the evenings with their wives and perhaps another couple would call round occasionally for a game of cards.

Jack told me that he missed the companionship of the men at work but he didn't see them because he didn't drink and consequently never went to a pub.

The working experience of men, as colleagues in an environment which, with its inherent dangers, both required and fostered close communication and cooperation between the team members, provides the raison d'etre for male-male friendship in this part of Wales. Indeed, camaraderie of workmates was considered so important - essential - that not getting on with workmates was felt to be a good enough reason for moving to another job. Dai Butch told me that he had very much enjoyed working at the Brynteg Colliery because he liked the boys who worked with him there and was very sorry when the pit

closed down. Moving to the Rheola ironworks, he explained:

> "I was only there 3 months. I didn't like it there. The job was lovely - but I didn't care for the crowd."

The fact that this camaraderie is intrinsically connected with the workplace is so is manifested most clearly in the period following retirement. It is the general experience for retired men to find that there is a short period during which they keep contact with old workmates, meeting at one of the popular locations, but this quickly drops away. Elderly men are less able to afford to buy pints in the way they had done when they were working. Increasing physical frailty makes the process of getting to a pub difficult.[9]

Raymond told me that he had continued to see his friends from work after he retired "for a while, for a while, but it dropped off." Tom's experience was similar. He reminisced about the number of friends he used to have during his working days, but added "my friends just seem to have disappeared." Bill, who used to enjoy a drink, said he never had one now:

> "Not unless I go out for a dinner or something like that, OAPs do or something..Now I've got to make sure I can get there and get back. I can get over to the Lamb and Flag now, but what I find hard is how to get back."

Furthermore, even if he could get there physically he'd find it difficult to afford. He said:

> "I used to enjoy a pint and a chat and a game of darts, playing the dominoes and all that. But it's got now that you can't afford to go in the pub and play, see."

Dai "Butch" told me:

> "I don't go out a lot now, see. I've finished drinking - ten years ago- too dear."

Other reasons made him reluctant to socialise too, including the death of old friends. He went on:

> "I don't miss it at all. There were three friends of mine, who used to go to Welfare. They died there. And I said: I'm not bloody going to die in that place."

Daniel John still went out but he was dependent on his getting a lift down to the Jubilee Club and a taxi back.For that reason he was strongly considering undertaking a move to a sheltered home - from where he could walk to the Jubilee Club, just around the corner.

But generally in old age men shift their socialising activities to other arenas, such as day centres, Old Age clubs and public benches. For Daniel, despite the enormous pleasure he derived from his visits to the Jubilee Club, he also looked forward to the time he spent at a daycentre in Pontardawe. From the initial once-weekly visit there, he had succeeded, after a period on the waiting list, in increasing this to twice a week. He took the opportunity, on these occasions, to visit two of his old workmates who had gone into the residential home, situated in the same grounds as the daycentre. In the remaining days, whenever it was sunny, Daniel John would take the opportunity to be in his front garden, telling me that as people passed by he was then able to seize the chance to chat to them. Indeed, a very sociable man, he was clearly also resourceful enough to adapt to the new circumstances which accompanied his advanced years, and to work with them in order to maintain a social circle rather than to withdraw into loneliness.

Dai "Butch" was equally resourceful. He met his elderly friends at a place that was easy for them all to get to - the public bench on the side of the main road through the village. He said:

> "I go down on a seat, Evan and I, every day. Mrs R- is a widow. She goes down every day. And we talk. And Francis, a widow. She comes over too. And another one comes over. And we chat for two, three hours."

Again, for entertainment in the evening he often walked down to what he referred to as "the old people's homes." He explained:

> "I sit there talking to them from seven to nine, see, and I get to chat with them."

Other elderly men were not so adaptable in the changed circumstances of the other end of the life cycle. Howard, for instance, did not attend a daycentre because he did not feel he would be any use to anyone the way he was - that is, in a wheelchair.

Male-male companionship and friendship generally remains very important to men in this part of Wales up to and including the occasion of retirement. Popularity with one's colleagues is extremely satisfying and several elderly men spoke with relish of the good send-off they received from the boys when they retired. However, these were the fortunate ones as many men, owing to works closures and early retirement resulting from sickness, accident or disability were deprived of such ritually charged leaving ceremonies: as we shall see in Chapter V.

In old age, it is quite common for men to look almost exclusively to female family members for friendships, or companionship, or to female home helps or female next-door-neighbours. Howard, for example, a childless widow, looked on his home helps as

friends, although his closest friend was his next-door-neighbour Margaret (whose father he had been friends with years previously).

In old age, where married men have friends calling in, they tend to be friends of the wife. For men who have retired, she is often their only link with the wider world.

Jack and his wife, who had left Wales for London during the early days of their marriage, left most of their friends behind in London when they moved back down to Wales following retirement. He described how his wife went on making friends in the particular way that women have - on bus stops, in shop queues, and so on - stressing that she was the sociable one, not he. He didn't resent this at all: he was happy to be given the opportunity to meet new people in this way.

Will had a widower friend who called on him every day. The connection was that both of their wives had been friends previously, so in a sense even after death their wives continued to act as the key links in their friendship.

The same-age environment such as the sheltered home is another place where elderly men are able to enter a social circle and conduct friendship-relationships with their peers. Outwardly, it would appear that they are less successful than their female counterparts in negotiating such relationships. They mix less freely than the women and tend to have acquaintances rather than friends who will foster individual relationships with them and visit them in their rooms. However this appears to satisfy the men, who are accustomed to such a method of conducting their friendships.

Gordon was one of my informants who lived in a sheltered home. He was satisfied with being on the periphery and watching the women talk. The kind of talk that went on in the communal sitting room it seemed was very much in the nature of talk to the gallery. Gordon enjoyed the company of the other residents in the complex, saying: "They're all in the same boat as I am, see." They would congregate in the day room, listen to gramophone records and the women would generally do most of the talking. Gordon said: "I sit down and listen to everything." This "listening" seemed to make Gordon feel involved with this society and part of the environment in which he lived.

In contrast with the women, men, although very close to their mothers, did not conduct what could really be called friendship-relationships with them. Any comradeship with their fathers was obtained through the experience of working alongside them in the pit or metal works, which was, indeed, a very common experience.

3.3.2 Friendships with people of the opposite sex

As already discussed in Chapter II, friendships with members of the opposite sex were discouraged in this society. Other research has suggested that this feature is characteristic of the generation, not only of this society (Adams,1985). It was very difficult, even in schooldays, to strike up a platonic friendship with a member of the opposite sex. As Elsie put it:

> "if you were seen talking to somebody twice, everybody assumed you were courting that person."

Male-female friendships were impossible after marriage. Some elderly people considered the practice immoral, indeed "disgusting." Others thought that it would not have been a good thing for their own marriage. Mrs T- said:

> "I don't think when you're married it's a good idea... I think I would probably be very jealous."

And others still saw it as "common"; Sal said: "It was the worst thing out, it was "common", wasn't it! I don't know why!"

Edna could be described as something of a bohemian in her personal dress style, skill as a painter and relaxed, informal, highly independent ways. She was also something of an exception for a woman of her generation and her locality as she told me that throughout her life she had found it easier to make male friends than female friends. She described how she would go out to the pub for a drink with one or two of them of an evening. But, she quickly added:

> "I was a widow when I had (male)friends. [She became a widow at the age of 32]. I would never doublecross Kenneth."

It appears that the notion that men and women could simply be friends is very hard to digest for people of this generation. Several reason suggest themselves. The central importance of the family in the social structure of this area, with the strongly differentiated functions of men and women in it, would have made the possibility of a "neutral", or non-sexual, friendship between men and women appear at best irrelevant, at worst disruptive. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine what men and women of this generation could have found in common. Again, as we have seen, men spent most of the time in the pit or works and the pub, women in the home. There was no common

meeting ground, either geographically or mentally. As Katie bluntly put it, "We didn't have time. We didn't have washing machines then."

Again, it is likely that in youth, men and women would indeed have looked upon each other primarily as potential marriage partners. Dai Butch related an incident to me which demonstrates the issues involved. He said:

> "I went out with one girl, she was a stranger here. I only went out with her three times and she wanted to get married! I told her: What the hell is the matter with you, girl? Go home!"

In the end he married another girl, at the grand old age of 21. Ivy, from London, similarly objected to the assumptions of the men she worked with, when at 40 she was made a widow and this shows that among this generation at least there was a general predilection to assume women were interested in trapping men into marriage, first and foremost.

> "They <u>thought</u>, and it used to annoy me, that you were waiting on the doorstep for them,"

she remembered.

My informants have carried their ideas about male-female friendships into their advanced age. Elderly men claimed that any woman they approached for conversation would assume they had intentions more in the way of courtship. Bill said:

> "That's what the women think if you start talking to them. They women think you're trying to fly a bit of a kite."

However, he added:

> "I wouldn't be. I have no interest. It would only just be as a friendship talking to them."

Women, while generally professing no interest in the courtship side of things, find it difficult to approach any individual elderly man in case their intentions should be misinterpreted. Gladys said:

> "There's a gentleman living next door to me - well he's a bachelor - you see, you can't call on a man, can you?"

Elvira said: "I'd be the talk of the village straight away."

One 91 year-old woman explained to me,

> "Harold next door comes in [he has the room next to her at the sheltered homes], but I don't ask him to sit down, then people won't talk."

Elsie acknowledged that the new mores operating in society were of a different nature in this regard. She said, smilingly:

> "This is how the generation has changed. You're far more open than my generation was."

Nevertheless, it is very difficult for elderly women to break the habits of a lifetime. In their own life histories, any friendship maintained with a man necessarily possessed courtship overtones. Any man that they referred to in their life histories as being of importance at some point in their lives, with the exception of fathers, brothers and husbands, had been boyfriends.

In sheltered homes - in the day rooms - persons of the same sex keep together[10]. Similarly in day centres, groups of women sit together, with the fewer men at another cluster of tables somewhere across the room. The sexes stick together during lunch and during any day trip. It is the behaviour with which this age group are comfortable and familiar. Although they are aware of new standards and new values operating in society

these do not have any power over their own behaviour. This is another example, perhaps, of what is meant by the folk expression "You can't teach an old dog new tricks."

For those elderly people who do find themselves in friendship relationships with peers of the opposite sex they find satisfaction in these and generally report no inkling of romantic overtones. Olive said:

> "Oh no. Mr K-, he's a very nice man. When I was ill he came to see me I don't know how many times. Chocolates and cigarettes he brought me. Fruit. Out of kindness."

There was only one couple, both individuals of whom I interviewed, who enjoyed a courtship dimension to their friendship. This was Glanmor and Mary. Since meeting Glanmor at the day centre, Mary had fallen into the habit of inviting him to dinner and tea on a Sunday. Glanmor enjoyed his friendship with Mary and described her as "very kind." He added: "She would probably marry me if I asked her but I'm not interested."

He believed himself to be too old for this kind of relationship. Mary, in turn, was proud of having this "gentleman friend" and it was one of the first things she told me about herself, and one of the first things others at the daycentre told me about her. However, I received the distinct impression that, unknown to Glan, her plans extended no further than keeping him as a gentleman friend - not, that is, to marriage. In other words, their relationship was in actual fact a platonic friendship with flirtatious elements attached, both for outward show and because this was a form, a style of dealing with the opposite sex with which both were comfortable and familiar.

3.3.3 Interaction with Neighbours

Neighbours are a very valuable support group for elderly people. Throughout this study, the way elderly people defined the term, and the way it will be employed henceforth, is that neighbours are people who live usually in the same street and no more than one street away. Those who have never worked outside the home, those who are "old-old", that is, 75 and over, and those who are living alone report the highest levels of interaction with their neighbours. To these people especially, neighbours provide companionship, practical assistance and the sense of security that comes from knowing someone is there to keep an eye on things - whether it be putting the dustbin out, fetching the pension, or checking as one passes by that the curtains are opened in the mornings and other daily rituals performed on time. As we have discussed previously, the activity of "neighbouring", of being a helpful, interested resident of one's street, is a characteristic of the community in which elderly people have lived out the most part of their lives. But in old age it possesses a special significance. To those who are bereaved, housebound, and relatively isolated from the rest of the community the value of the neighbour is greater now than it ever has been. To those who cannot go to society, society goes to them, more often than not in the form of a neighbour.

Evelyn had what she described as "wonderful neighbours". What that meant was that they came in to see her, bringing bread, local newspapers and gossip.

Lil's neighbour brought her milk up to her second floor flat, fetched her pension and so on. She also did Lil's hair and put on her tights in the morning so Lil would be able to avoid the cost of paying a home help to do these things.

Eunice enjoyed the fact that her neighbours took an interest in her. She chatted over the garden fence with her retired next-door-neighbours "and if they've got something nice they'll share with me" - she named a pie and half a melon as recent examples - and she would reciprocate. Other neighbours brought Eunice things from their gardens. She said: "They're neighbourly and nice." Indeed, "neighbourly" was used as an adjective meaning "agreeable, helpful and pleasant, concerned".

Neighbours can enjoy shared rituals which help to pass the day and alleviate loneliness. Rosina's neighbour, for example, came over first thing in the morning, then at dinner time and then at 7 o'clock in time for a particular television programme..

Neighbours, in view of their uniquely placed positions, are particularly useful in times of illness or other crisis. When Lorraine broke her ankle, her neighbours did the shopping for her. But under normal circumstances Lorraine was reluctant to bother them. She explained:

> "I know if I was to ask them they would go - but I'm like my mother, I'd rather do it myself."

Nevertheless, Lorraine's case illustrates how neighbours are always there at hand in the background, while their involvement is likely to be activated during any time of need even for those who hesitate from calling upon them in normal circumstances (see Mann, 1954).

Others know that in times of need, such as a sudden illness or fall, they can call upon neighbours to help. The knowledge that one can rely on one's neighbours can increase the daily quality of life for many an elderly person. Elsie, for example, while keeping

some distance from her neighbours, was reassured by the knowledge that they would help if necessary. She said:

> "The understanding with Garth next door is that if I needed anything when I was here on my own, knock the wall. And one of them would be in, no problem."

For Daniel John, his neighbours were very helpful when he was unable to get out of the bath one day; he was able to raise the alarm by knocking on the wall.

There were some among my informants who preferred to keep themselves to themselves; content to greet their neighbours in the street, they nevertheless preferred to keep their distance, to avoid the practice of going in and out of each other's houses. Researchers have seen this sort of behaviour as more middle-class on the one hand or else found among the extreme end of the working class - the "undesirables"[11]. Neither of these observations applied directly to my own study which was mostly comprised of working class subjects anyway. However,the handful who were middle-class subjects among my informants did not distinguish themselves from the rest in their attitude towards and behaviour as neighbours. From a study of this size clearly it is inappropriate to make generalized assumptions. But those who preferred to keep their distance seemed to have felt this way all their lives and perhaps can simply be described as more private personalities. Descriptions of some of my informants who subscribed to this idea will illustrate the extent of the diversity here.

Mrs T- lived alone in her house with her dog and was an active, healthy, if self-confessedly lonely 76. She also kept a distance from her neighbours claiming "I don't like

somebody breathing over my shoulder." Mary also lived alone, in a modern flat. A very capable, gregarious woman she said

> "I don't like going into other people's houses... I don't believe in this going in and out of people's houses because there's too much gossip."

The fear of "gossip" perhaps illustrates the way in which, for some old people, too much involvement in society can be destructive and counter-productive, constituting a form of "control" than co-operation.

Edna was a fiercely self-reliant woman of 88. It was consonant with her whole way of life that she claimed she would never ask her neighbours for anything. Even in the event of an emergency she told me she would prefer to sit and wait till the morning when the home help would arrive.

These people are relatively immune to the changed social conditions which have eroded away the practice of being a good neighbour among the younger generations. Younger women are more often than not working in the days and returning home tired in the evenings to see to their own households. They neither have the time nor the energy nor the notion to extend this concern to neighbours. But those elderly people who have been accustomed to an involvement with their neighbours do find this change difficult to come to terms with. For those whose long term neighbours have died and who now find themselves living next to young working people, with little free time, this change is perceived as a loss.

Violet felt it as a loss. She said:

> "Well, for one thing, I haven't got no neighbours. The street, everywhere you go, it's all changed, nobody bothers. All my neighbours died. I went down to the house in 1935, I've been there since it was built. I'm the only one left. All the others are younger, they're nearly all working. Life's not the same. I don't see a soul."

Olive was a very sociable, outgoing woman who had cultivated friends and got to know her neighbours all her life. Now she told me, sadly

> "As the old neighbours go and the young ones come, they don't want to know you."

Ivy said that the neighbours "aren't much use" - she saw them very infrequently and she perhaps, coming down from London in her old age, may have needed them more than ever.

Vera's experience of her neighbours was mixed. She had been deeply upset by one, a younger married woman who, shortly after moving in, got into the habit of banging on the wall every time Vera's dog barked, accompanying this with shouted complaints. On the other hand, a young woman neighbour from across the road had proved to be very helpful and supportive. This neighbour had visited her in hospital and on one occasion helped her clear up the mess when Vera's food cupboard collapsed. Vera telephoned her, asking for help then and knows she could do so again in the future. "I know if I called her she would come, " she said.

This general disappointment in the activity of neighbours today fits into a wider recognition, by elderly people that the younger generations differ from them in this respect. Rachel's opinion was that people have changed in Cwmgwrach, her village.

"They haven't got time. When I was young everybody helped each other. They would come in to say: do you want anything? Are you alright?"

Phyllis made the same observation:

"Well we used to be in the street all in one.. the neighbours would be running in and out of one another's houses. If anybody died they'd be there fussing. More people today are working, they keep themselves to themselves... And in the summer all the women would be sitting on the windowsills with the babies, all gossiping around. You don't see that today!"

3.3.4 Friends, neighbours and family compared

As we have already discussed, not everyone differentiates between their friends and their neighbours. For those who do make a distinction, neighbours tend to be more involved with the practical aspects of daily life and where they make a contribution it is to ensure that the wheels of daily life run smoothly[12]. By helping to fetch shopping, prescriptions and pensions, by keeping an eye on things, they ensure that the fabric of ordinary daily life for an elderly person does not get torn to shreds by the incapacities of advanced age and infirmity. Where an elderly person is reasonably healthy and mobile and can be an active neighbour in his/her own right, being able to help an infirm neighbour bestows on them a sense of purpose and a feeling of satisfaction. Help given and reciprocated, visits paid and received, conversations held over the garden fence, all contribute towards keeping alive a sense of community. Even for the elderly person who lives alone,rarely ventures out and sees very few people, the vigilance of a neighbour in checking to see that she has picked up her milk from the step or opened her curtains produces a feeling of peace of mind and a sense of being part of a watchful, caring community - in the old meaning of the term.

Minnie, a single retired woman living alone, encapsulates this position most clearly. One day, she recounted, she decided unusually for her to have a lie-in and her next-door-neighbour came to see if she was alright since she hadn't seen her or heard her. This was very pleasing to her."So I mean, I've got somebody who takes an interest in me," she explained.

On the other hand many elderly people tell me that they can talk to friends - truly confide and discuss matters of importance or intimacy. With neighbours, however, they restrict themselves to trivialities.

Ella said:

> "You don't talk about things of interest with your neighbours - with your neighbours, its just - ordinary things, and with your friends, you can discuss other things."

She explained that "ordinary" things meant "shops and things, mundane things." But with her friends she discussed things that meant a lot to her, such as religion.

Iris agreed with this. She said:

> "What you talk about with the neighbours are just trivialities. But with your friends, you talk."

Elsie wouldn't confide in her neighbours. She explained: "You pick and choose the people you can talk to." Those whose friends are set apart from their neighbours associate their friends with particular settings - church, work, schooldays, neighbourhoods in which one has lived - or activities such as club going. Friends are particularly important at this life stage where other roles have diminished or cease altogether in

some cases.In same-age settings residents can choose their friends from among their neighbours, but obviously not all their neighbours will become friends.

Agnes said:

> "You know, there's different sorts of neighbours to be had, you know. I wouldn't make a friend out of the one that's living opposite. She's not reliable. And she'll tell lies. Yes."

Through asking elderly people to list the individuals of greatest importance to them and who they felt closest to it was possible to conclude that family come first in significance, followed by friends and neighbours[13]. Even where family lives at a considerable distance away or for whatever reason is rarely seen, a family member is invariably cited by the old person as being the most important individual in his or her life[14]. This may not even be a very close family member; it may be a cousin or a niece or nephew. In some cases, the two might not even have a particularly good or close relationship. What seems to be most important is the need to feel that one belongs to a family, a link joining the individual to a group, justifying his or her existence. Although maybe alone and lonely in daily life, the sense of belonging to a family seems to be reassuring evidence of membership of a greater whole, a clan.

Where family is in contact with the elderly person and enjoys a close and warm relationship, the elderly person will frequently choose to spend time with them in preference to friends and neighbours. Sal preferred to be in the company of her grandchildren to anyone else. She told me:

> "Your life changes after a certain age. Some of your friends have moved away. And they've had grandchildren. That's what I done, see, spend my time with my grand-children."

Putting daughters and grand-daughters first is another reason several elderly people gave me for choosing not to get married again - as will be explored later in chapter V. Where conflicting demands on their time and loyalty in this situation are foreseen, old people put family first.

While neighbours are very often of different ages and tend to be younger where they give assistance and help to an elderly person, friends, on the other hand, tend to be of much the same age and, as mentioned previously, were often met in childhood or adolescence and can share in events and activities not as helpers but from a position of equality. This is one reason why sheltered housing encourages the making of friends - neighbours here will be very similar in age and status.

Olive goes to Mothers' Union meetings with her friends. She told me:

> "I walk down, supported by my friend's arm - she's 81, she's got a car and drives around. I've got another good friend down there- she's 90."

These friends are able to derive equal enjoyment from the same things and function as companions. On one of the visits I made to Olive she told me that the coming weekend she was going to London with the W.I. and she and three close friends had booked to have tea in the Waldorf Hotel. "There's a tea dance there. Four of us! And two 88s!" she laughed, poking gentle fun of their ambition.

But to give the idea that friends and neighbours can always be differentiated would be to give a false idea. In this part of the world and among this generation friends were often people living close by and were therefore neighbours too. The fact that the majority of married women did not work outside the home clearly restricted the areas

in which they could make friends to that of the immediate locality, except where women developed distinct outside interests of their own. Even the latter were most likely to be highly localised, for instance in the case of activities centred around church or chapel. For men too their workmates were usually their neighbours. Ironically, in old age alone for some are opportunities presented to meet widely-based people - friends who will not also be neighbours. These come in the form of old age day centres drawing on several villages and valley towns from which people are all brought together by means of a special bus.

Where friends and neighbours cannot always be differentiated, then, family nevertheless stands apart. Neighbours are most important in the practical sense for elderly people without family; those who have a daughter living close by will look to her to perform actions such as shopping, fetching pensions, which otherwise a neighbour might do. In these cases, a neighbour's help will supplement the help given by family.

Agnes expressed this position very clearly. When I asked her if she had helped her close friend in any way she said at once "no, she had a family, see, and they used to come over",clearly setting out her ideas on the hierarchy.

Eunice explained the difference between the significance of family and neighbours in her life. She said:

> "I can't see my family as often as I'd like to. Now, my neighbours are there - they live there - my family don't live there. My next-door-neighbour is always there. They told me if any emergency to ... again, my family help me with my business and finance."

3.4 Interaction with the wider community: Social contacts and self-perceptions

Whether an elderly person sees him/herself as sociable and possessing friends or not is very closely bound up with self-image, which in turn both reflects and affects the way in which he/she relates to society. One aspect of self-image that I have explored in the course of this study is self-perceived age: whether one sees oneself regardless of chronological age, as old or middle-aged. In this context, it has been observed that seeing oneself as not old is a sign of positive adjustment and high morale, given all the negative associations connected with old age (see Tuckman, 1957; Peter, 1971; Matthews, 1979; Thompson, Itzin, Abendstern, 1990).

Being sociable was considered by many of the elderly people I studied to be a very important positive personality attribute, in the same way that being part of a neighbourhood and community was seen as very important. Possibly it becomes even more important in old age when other aspects of the personality no longer had an opportunity for expression - for example, skills at work or with children. Possessing a social network seemed to result in the fact that elderly people saw themselves as younger than those who did not possess one. Also, people with a social network definitely appeared less withdrawn and depressed than those without.

Eiluned said she was very lonely because she had very little company and considered herself to be "old". At the age of 50, she said, "I had more company."

Ella, who on another occasion complained of being very lonely, said she felt "ancient...because I am very old."

Phyllis similarly had withdrawn into herself. She said:

> "I'm feeling old to what I was, I am feeling old. Because I can't get about like I had. I can't do what I want to do. And I get exhausted very quickly."

On the other hand, Olive, one of the most sociable elderly women I met was bashful to say she felt young owing to her chronological age - she was 87- and settled for calling herself "middle-aged" instead.

Daniel John was another highly gregarious individual. He said:

> "Sometimes I feel as good as anybody.. but not old - oh no, not that, I don't think that."

Nor did Agnes, equally involved in social activities. No. I don't. Only I feel a bit shaky - my balance, then."

When questioned, elderly people's perceptions of old age were very negative and it is inevitable then that they would wish to disassociate themselves from the condition. Those who admitted to being old felt "hindered", suffering from "aches and pains". They felt old following the onset of arthritis, the death of a spouse. In old age, they told me, you "slow down", "you can't get about as you used to", "your scope narrows", you "fall to pieces". Many elderly people also remembered having very negative expectations of being old when they were younger. Bill remembered thinking it was "bloody awful - old people trying to walk about, trying to do this and that."

Vera, at 82, said,

> "I can't accept being old. I thought this morning as I was getting up - I never ever thought of being old. It never entered my head at all. I just thought I'd be carrying on and on, you know. I got out of bed, I was finding it a bit stiff getting out of bed, and I thought to myself - why do we have to grow old?"

Some elderly people preferred to be among people of their own age[15]. The reasons they gave for this were very much along the line of Violet's, who said: "Old and young don't mix." Others suffered from hearing impairments which made them unable to keep up with younger people. Others professed distaste for the loud "jazz music" favoured by young people, and generally "feel out of it." Mrs T- said: "You can't keep up with them, you can't cope with it, see."

Along with that, there was a definite feeling as discussed in Chapter II, that vandalism was rife, that children used terrible language, that things were not as safe as they had used to be. Vera, for example, told me that years ago they never used to lock their door at all, even when they went out shopping. But now, she said, "I don't even go to the bathroom without locking the door."

Explanations have been sought by many researchers to explain this. They have cited the generation gap for this (Bengtson,1976) and have also looked upon old people as a group set apart from the rest of society, occupying a minority group position (Barron,1953; Lopata,1971), or being part of a subculture (Rose,1962), possessing a lower status. While these reasons are all interesting and possible in themselves, they are

also somewhat negative and I would suggest that there is a sense in which every age group prefers its own company and that this is both reasonable and predictable.

However it is true that in some cases those who were particularly active and outgoing claimed to enjoy the company of people younger than themselves, emphasising the fact that they still felt capable of deriving pleasure from partaking in mainstream society.

Vera said that up until a few years ago two young girls living across the road would come and do her shopping.

> "And they'd be telling me all about their boyfriends and all this... I used to love hearing them talking."

Olive said:

> "A couple of years ago I had a young Australian friend used to come and see me every week. She's 28! If you extend a welcome, even if they're young, they'll come and see you, won't they?"

Even those who firmly stick to their own age group for friendship reasons maintain contact with the younger generation through family members - grandchildren, great-grandchildren, so that the divide between generations is certainly not absolute. Other old people enjoy talking to younger people, whether related or not, and find opportunities to do so with home helps, neighbours and young relatives of other elderly people.

As we have mentioned before, centres where elderly people can go to socialise and meet others include Old Age clubs, daycentres, the communal hall or day room of a sheltered accommodation complex. This is an important way in which a sense of community can

be preserved in people who are no longer actively involved in it through work, having young children, etc.

When Bill attended his twice weekly OAP club its purpose was to

> "have a meeting, tea and biscuits and one thing and another. Get all the news."

Agnes was content in her sheltered accommodation.

> "Plenty of neighbours. And the warden is very good. We have bingo downstairs every Thursday and a cup of tea."

Elwyn enjoyed his once-weekly trips to the daycentre very much.

He said:

> "I <u>love</u> coming here, I'll tell you, I love coming here.. I look forward to Tuesday."

Olive very much enjoyed her experience of Old Age clubs. She

said:

> "I shall be going there tonight. There's a minibus picking us up. We have a talk, and there's singers coming there, and we have Bingo. And I go to the whist drive every Friday night. I've gone to Spain and to Austria and Germany."

Alice had persevered in attending her daycentre, although she had found it hard to get used to at the beginning." In the beginning it was very strange" she told me.

Similarly Mary persevered, even though she did not enjoy it totally, it was the first time she'd gone anywhere in 2 years. "It's alright ... it's a bit boring."

3.5 The experience of loneliness

Loneliness was a very common feeling among the elderly people I interviewed in South Wales. Indeed, more people were experiencing loneliness, or had felt lonely at some point in their recent lives, than had not done so which suggests that they were feeling set apart from their communities in some sense. It must be pointed out here that what we are looking at in this section is not physical isolation as such, but the feeling of loneliness, which indicates dissatisfaction with one's current situation. To differentiate between the two we may take Peter Townsend's definition as pertinent:

> "To be socially isolated is to have few contacts with family and community; to be lonely is to have an unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship"(Townsend,1963:188) .

That is, it is the subjective experience of isolation, not the objective experience, that concerns us here.

Several main reasons emerged to account for the experience of loneliness.

i) Some elderiy people felt lonely because they couldn't go out as they had used to: Eiluned felt lonely "sometimes. I like to see my daughter - she takes me out in a wheelchair."

Daniel John felt lonely despite his good neighbours and his daughter who was living nearby. "When you're feeling lonely it's because you've got nothing to do," he told me:

> "If the weather's bad and you can't do nothing, you can't go out. You're sitting around, the TV's boring."

Consequently winter was his loneliest time, when he was unable to make the trip down to his daughter's or to work in his garden.

Lil felt a sense of loneliness during the times she used to go to Sisterhood at the Chapel and no longer can.

Agnes lived on a second floor flat and explained:

> "In the days and nights you get lonely because I can't go downstairs. And from my window it's all trees. And I don't see anyone walking along the road. You seem to be away from it all."

Elvira said she felt lonely in the night, from about 6 o'clock onwards.

> "The dark night and things. I used to be able to walk in the summer till I fell."

ii) The onset of physical disability, such as having poor eyesight, often resulted in feelings of loneliness, as one is cut off from activities one once enjoyed, unable to visit friends and family.

Miss L- said:

> "At times, you get lonely... but somebody comes or other... a friend comes in... you do feel it lonely sometimes.. my eyesight is going, you see."

iii) Being in company, but then having to return alone to an empty house can result in feelings of loneliness, as can living with people who go out in the day and leave the elderly person by him or herself. All these observations, in fact, emphasise that the experience of loneliness is indeed a <u>comparative</u> experience: between the way things

were at other points in the elderly person's life and the way they are now; between that individual and his or her peers (See Jylha and Jokela,1990).

Bonnie said:

> "I go down to my daughter's on a Sunday... after I go home that night I miss them. And I have a good cry. Then I feel better."

Like Ethel, she'd always been in company, so loneliness was new to her.

Emily became lonely when the grand daughter and grand son-in-law she lived with went out. She said:

> "Because they go out naturally, her and her husband. And I do watch the TV but I can't see it very well. And I do think... so much for life. Now I do feel like that at times. Only when you're on your own."

Rosina explained:

> "There'll be times when my son will be going out at 6 in the morning and he won't be home till 7 o'clock in the night. I'll be there all day."

But she finds some mitigating factors.

> "As long as I've got my knitting I don't mind. And I take a book in the night if I can't sleep."

iv) Loneliness often arises more at some points in the day than at others. It is quite common to feel lonely during the evening, especially during winter evenings when darkness sets in early and can exacerbate one's feelings of isolation and remoteness from others.

Eunice explained:

"I get depression on times - when evening comes. I miss my husband terribly, because I had a wonderful husband."

Howard said: "It's mostly in the evenings." He explained:

"I suppose.. its a feeling of - I've got to rely on everybody, that's the worst part. Otherwise, I would be alright, I could go out for a walk: I could go down to Swansea, do some shopping."

Ivy was very aware of being alone at times in her remote cottage, without neighbours, accustomed as she was to living in London.

She described:

"When it gets near bedtime, 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock it's dead quiet, there's not a sound. And I've gone out into the garden to call the cat in and... you might as well be miles from anywhere. So then I say to myself: "I'm going to bed." And once I'm in my book, I'm alright."

These feelings are new for most people as they were part of a big family and report never having been lonely in the past. Without doubt, this generation is suffering from the breakdown of the old-style community, characterised by large families often living in the same house, and strong neighbourliness. There is more opportunity for elderly people to feel isolated than ever before.The TV can help in filling in empty hours, as can reading or knitting. Subscribing to a particular faith also helps one in overcoming the despair that can accompany persistent and unrelieved loneliness.

Emily said:

"Sometimes in the evening with the dark nights.. but the television is there, takes your mind off things."

Lorraine said she felt lonely but tried to shrug it off by knitting or reading a book.

Ivy admitted:

> "I'd like somebody to talk to, sometimes... I knit a lot, I'm lucky I can still knit and I can watch the TV and I read a lot - I read more than I ought to.. I go to bed early sometimes and read till about one o'clock in the morning."

Ella felt lonely mainly in the evenings when she was alone, and on holidays. But her belief in spiritualism got her though this. Iris, who felt lonely "in a house full of people" was also sustained by the same faith.

Ethel confessed to feelings of loneliness but added:

> "I shouldn't feel lonely because I believe in my Creator, and I always call on Him when I'm in need."

v) Having lots of company may or may not help with feelings of loneliness, depending indeed on what has been termed the "loneliness threshold" (see Johnson and Mullins,1987). This is a little like the pain threshold. As some people require more or less pain-producing sensations to feel pain, then others need more or less feelings of aloneness to feel lonely.

Company helped Margaret who was living with her daughter and son-in-law. She said: "They don't give me time to feel lonely." But it did not help Iris, who felt that she was alone when everyone else was part of a couple.

> "It just comes over you, you're the only one on your own, everybody else is a couple."

She enjoyed going out with her eldest daughter, who was a divorcee, and also not in a couple, therefore not constantly reminding her of her loss. The lack of balance - a single

person socialising with couples - again introduces a comparative element into the situation, which again gives rise to the feeling of loneliness.

Vera, a single woman whose pattern of life has become a series of methods of dealing with being alone,said: "I don't feel lonely but I have felt lonely in a crowd."

It can also arise at certain significant times of the year such as birthdays, Christmas, holidays.

vi) Having a spouse can mitigate feelings of loneliness. But it is not an antidote to the kind of loneliness that arises as a result of feeling cut off from the rest of the community and one's friends as a result of retirement coupled with physical frailty. Indeed, many researchers have pointed to the factor of friendship as being particularly significant in offsetting loneliness. This factor, although likely to be underestimated, is reported to be important regardless of one's marital status and level of contact with family (Sermat,1978).

Jack said he could imagine feeling lonely if his wife wasn't around. At present, he did not feel lonely.

vii) For others, it is a dog or another kind of pet who helps to combat loneliness. Mrs T- said:

> "Life is lonely, innit, at my age.. of course, they pick up the phone and they phone you, but I got the dog see and you know that dog has kept my sanity."

Vera considered her dog, Lady, to be the most important "person" in her life. When she was in hospital, she remembered, the biggest incentive for getting well was the thought of returning to Lady.

Many elderly people, when asked to name the main problems people experience when they get older, singled out loneliness. It may or may not be that they experience loneliness personally - but they recognize this as a general and widespread occurrence among people at their stage of life. Loneliness resulted from losing one's lifelong partner, one's friends and siblings. It resulted from physical frailty, which has an isolating effect, and from age-related poverty - the inability to afford to go out, to have a drink. Caring for one's invalid partner or sibling is a similarly isolating event.

Other causes of loneliness identified by researchers in the field include poor hearing ability; self-perceived health status as poor; advanced, as opposed to younger old age (see Creecy et al,1985). But the main factor without doubt is that of comparison between current and former ways of life and this is corroborated by my own findings. Lopata (1975) identified eleven different kinds of loneliness among widows, all resulting from the absence of certain elements, formerly present, from their lives.

Mr and Mrs J- said: "As you get older, you experience people leaving you one by one."

Ella said: "Loneliness is a disease." She felt that loneliness was a bigger problem now than it had been in the days of her youth because people tended to have bigger families in the old days.

viii) It must be noted that those individuals who have experienced loneliness at previous points in their life find it easier to cope with the experience of loneliness in old age. Such people include single people, who do not have to adjust to the loss of a spouse, and also people who were only children. Olive, for example, told me that she'd always been lonely because she was an only child. For such individuals, it is not the unabating, shattering experience that it is for those unaccustomed to it, but comes in small bouts, like rheumatism in damp weather,which must be born out. Ethel, on the other hand, was not accustomed to it and found it extremely difficult to cope with. This was the first time in her life she had experienced loneliness, and she told me:

> "I've always been in company. And when you come to a stage when you have to be alone in your own home, you're apt to get lonely."

It is true, indeed, that the fear of loneliness can be a very powerful contributing factor encouraging elderly people to socialise with others. This was the case with Minnie - retired, single and the last remaining member of her family, who was at pains to ensure that the only day of the week one would find her at home was a Saturday.

Agnes too admitted that the reason she had started attending her day centre was that of the tremendous isolation she had felt, wheelchair bound, in her second floor flat.

For Vera, the extreme loneliness which followed on the death of her mother prompted this spinster to join a club for the first time in her life. It was an OAP club, which she joined before she was 60, but in her case, it was the only method of meeting people that she could imagine.

Other methods of keeping loneliness at bay included using the telephone to keep in touch with friends one is prevented from seeing through ill health (although not all old people felt comfortable with such a "modern" device) and "keeping busy" in the home.

Vera, a housebound 82, told me,

> "I'm on the phone every night.. I wouldn't like to be without the telephone."

Olive kept busy to avoid loneliness and depression.

> "What I do, I <u>do</u> things to forget that I'm alone. Like I do these flower arrangements, I tidy the garden. I put a row of kidney beans in this year. I had lettuce and radish. I put flowers in."

ix) The most common and acute form of loneliness resulted from bereavement. This form of particularly devastating loneliness has been labelled "desolation". Desolation has been defined in various ways. Two such definitions are given below and are consonant with the manner in which the term is employed in this chapter. Jaber Gubrium (1974) defined the term as "discontinuity in social engagement." Peter Townsend (1963:201) stated it thus,

> "To be desolate ... is to have been deprived recently of the companionship of someone who is loved."

Townsend saw desolation as the most important ingredient in the experience of loneliness in old age. He wrote (1963:205):

> "although the two are connected, the underlying reason for loneliness in old age is desolation rather than isolation."

The most common contributing factor for desolation was that of the death of a spouse.

Just over one-third of my widowed respondents, with the death of their spouse having occurred from between one and twenty five years ago, claimed to experience this acute form of loneliness.

Dai "Butch" said he felt lonely in the night, ever since his wife died.

Iris felt absolutely devastated when her husband died. Indeed, she said:

> "I do to this day. It's 11 years this weekend and I just don't know what to do."

Still-married people whose spouse was senile are equally as lonely as the bereaved. One husband in this position told me:

> "The only person I can talk to is God and I don't like to disturb him - having conversations with him all the time."

3.6 The experience of bereavement

This is the event that is more likely than any other event in old age to result in social isolation and to precipitate feelings of loneliness in the bereaved individual. The group most affected by bereavement in old age is that of married women, experiencing the death of their husband. They are greater in numerical terms, and there are other factors differentiating the experience of bereavement for them, which will be examined in

Chapter V. The death of the spouse is rivalled only by the death of the mother, which occurs at an earlier point in the lifecycle, when one generally has more resources open to one. The death of siblings or of one's friends can also be significant to an individual at this stage in his or her life.

However, in this section we will be concentrating on the death of the spouse, for it is this event which seems to have the greatest effect on experiences of loneliness in old age.The expression that is used repeatedly by widows and widowers in describing the circumstance of losing one's spouse is that of "emptiness". It is as if a great void is produced in the social world of the individual left behind and there is the sense of a vacuum opening up in one's life. With loneliness being a comparative experience, the removal of an individual who has been at the heart of one's social life - may indeed at this stage <u>be</u> one's social life - has an effect which in its sweeping intensity has been termed "desolation".

Mrs T- said: "You can't believe the emptiness."

Elsie saw it as

> "an empty void.. and that's an emptiness that will not be filled... no matter how kind people are, no matter how wonderful the family are. That empty space is there."

Glanmor said:

> "The bottom of my world had dropped out.. I was wondering how on earth I was going to reconstruct my life again."

Mrs O- said she felt "as if - the world had finished for me."

Howard said that after his wife died "my life was empty."

Obviously, as has been noted, single elderly people are at an advantage here because generally they have established a pattern of life over the years which has had worked into it a certain amount of self-reliance, both psychological and practical. Some researchers have described this pattern of life as one built up in such a way as to erect barriers against loneliness (Gubrium,1975). However, this was not true for all the single people in my study it was quite common to see a single person establishing a partnership with another individual who fulfilled some of the functions, both psychologically and practically, that would otherwise have been fulfilled by a spouse. These partnerships included a son with his mother, several mothers and daughters, two sisters, and two sister-and-brothers. The death of one individual in these cases would often give rise to similar feelings of desolation on the part of the one left behind.[16]

Similarly other forms of bereavement had equal power to deeply affect elderly people - the death of one's child, for instance. Sal told me,

> "You don't get over it, no matter how many years. But you've got to live with it. I'll never get over my son. You can get over your husband but you never get over your son. Your son is a part of your body. Your husband is a part of another woman's body."

Daniel John was thinking ahead to the possibility that his daughter, now in her 60s and in ill-health, would die before him.

> "My daughter, she's marvellous. Wonderful. But I've thought it over... assuming she's dead, what will I do when I'm 85? Its come to my mind several times. I've said to myself: "Dan, you've got to carry on. Whatever it is, that's your life, you've got to carry on." But I'd have a devil of a job. I'd miss my daughter terrible."

The loss was followed by a period of mourning in each case which could be described as a self-imposed social isolation, an act of removing oneself from the rest of the community. A common pattern was for individuals to stay at home, not seeing others unless they were called upon, not going out unless it was absolutely necessary - to shop, visit the doctor's. After two to three months they received a "push" from family or close friends which finally sent them back out into society. But even then, for a long period of time, while social activities were being pursued, there was no real sense of participation - it was more like going through the motions.

Violet withdrew for two years from society, she told me.

> "In which time I had a colostomy operation and I nearly died - grieving so much. I very rarely went out - my son and daughter used to try to get me to go out - but I couldn't go outside the door."

When Mary's husband died

> "at first I didn't go out at all.. About a month or more after I had to get out - the Doctor and the vicar pushed me."

Menna said: "I didn't go outside the door for three months." But eventually her friend encouraged her to go out and join a choir.

> "And I joined the choir. And that helped me. I hadn't been outside the door for three months. And I never turned back".

Ethel found a purpose which drew her back into society. She told me:

> "I had marvellous friends and they were encouraging me to get out. But what I did, I went in for voluntary work. And I found more happiness in that."

Mrs O-'s salvation came in joining the Old Age Club, which she did with the encouragement of her daughter, despite the fact that when her husband died she "felt as if the whole world had finished for me." Katie rejoined society following the death of her husband, but she continued to feel alone, set apart from the rest of society, for a considerable period of time. She explained:

> "Well I didn't know where I was, sort of thing. I used to make myself go out, with the Pensioners... but I felt alone in a crowd."

She described how one afternoon she went out to see the Welsh National Opera with a group of pensioners:

> "And I was sitting between (two pensioners) and the tears were running down my face, but they couldn't see me because we were sitting in the dark."

It took her eight to nine years, she said, before she was able to feel "part of things" again.

A minority of bereaved individuals reported that they did not recover properly and that they continued to go on feeling very lonely because of the loss of their partner. In most cases, their social lives had been badly affected as they no longer wanted to go out - and in the case of many women they did not feel that they were able to go out alone. These individuals tended to be widowed late in life - past the point, perhaps, for them when they would have felt prepared to adapt to a new set of circumstances in life.

Ella said that the idea that it can get better after time has passed is

> "a fallacy. They say time's a great healer: it may be a great healer if you marry somebody else. But if you loved your husband and nobody else comes up to him - well, that's it."

Ethel said that she was deprived of being able to go out to the extent that she had before because although she possessed a car she couldn't drive. Indeed, most women of this generation and locality were unable to drive: I met only two women who had possessed driving licences and one of these had lived in London all her life and in this case is an exception to the general pattern here, while the other was a single woman with her own professional career, who had told me proudly, "I was the first lady driver in Cwmavon."

Three years after the death of her husband, Elsie said that while she has acquired the self control not to show her feelings, if anything the pain and the loss gets worse with time. She acknowledged that she is not aided by being housebound:

> "Whereas others who come in here have lost their husbands, they can go out, they can put a coat on and go up the road and do some shopping and they can meet different people. I know they have to go back to the empty house, I understand that, but at least they can go out. I've had to get used to the fact that Bob wasn't here, <u>while I sat here</u>."

The men who experienced bereavement as an event which was deeply isolating had been acting as full-time carers and nursing their invalid wife for a considerable time before her death. As Bill said,

> "When she died, I had to start going out through the door. I had a job recognizing anybody after such a long time."

Interestingly, I observed that some of the women, who were able to enter fully into society again following their own bereavements, engaged in tie-breaking routines, which served both to acknowledge the event and to distance themselves from it. This is a socially prescribed event in many traditional cultures,where death rituals are still practised and where ritual acts of distancing oneself from the deceased are considered necessary in order for the bereaved to detach themselves from the dead individual and

reattach themselves to the community of the living. For example, among the Ainu of northern Japan (an aboriginal people): when a person dies the body is dressed in its best clothes and laid lengthwise by the hearth, the feet towards the doorway, ready for the departure for Hades. If he is a man, his bow, arrows, pipe, tobacco-box, knives, swords, clothes and cup etc are placed by his side. The clothes are cut and torn, the other things broken or chipped. All these articles are buried with the body. The cutting, chipping or breaking are said to be done in order to kill the things and send their spirits off to heaven with the corpse (Batchelor, in Rosenblatt, 1976: 155). As Rosenblatt et al (1976:68/9) observed,

> "We believe that such customs serve to break ties with the deceased spouse and, as a consequence, to facilitate establishment of new patterns of living."

Lorraine, for example, moved house shortly after her husband's death, because she said she could still visualise her husband there.

Ivy too said :

> "I could see him sitting in the armchair..I used to put his cup and saucer out from force of habit."

She moved house similarly.

Other women may not break the ties but they have felt the same way as Lorraine and Ivy, a difficult-to-lose certainty that things would carry on just as before. Rosina recalled:

> "I'll be sitting and I fancy I can hear my husband out in the back opening and shutting the door. And I turn my head, thinking he's coming in through the door. But that's not very often. Not now. It used to be, just after he died."

Elsie experienced the same fleeting pangs of belief that it was her husband approaching

their house even now,

> "I hear somebody whistling, coming up the pavement and for a split second
> I think it's Bob coming in from Garth next door."

And sometimes, watching TV, she'll turn to say something to Bob about it "Even now".

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explore the links elderly people have with the community in which they live and their sense of involvement with others by examining their relationships with three categories of individuals in particular - family, friends and neighbours.

We might ask the question: through what sort of relationships is the elderly person rendered socially satisfied and less likely to feel marginalised or irrelevant to others? Is any one category of individuals more important than another in producing these feelings, the opposite of which is the perception of loneliness?

One way of answering this question was to pose each individual in my study the question: "Who is most important/closest to you at this point in your life?" Invariably, the responses were: family first, then friends and neighbours. The individuals cited varied according to circumstances. Those whose spouse was living named the latter. Widows named children, frequently the eldest daughter. Those whose relationships with their children were poor named a grandchild.Childless widows named a sibling or cousin or niece or grandniece. Even where such an individual was rarely seen, perhaps was only

ever spoken to on the telephone, they still assumed a priority in the ideas of the elderly individual.

However, in real terms, in practical, daily terms, it may not be the case that the old person felt socially satisfied by dint of a (possibly distant) family connection. The other way, then, of answering the question would be to look at self-reported loneliness and the nature of the social contacts of those experiencing it. Three groups emerged. The first group comprised those who a) said they felt lonely and b) also had contact with their families; the second group comprised those who a) said they felt lonely and b) had no/very little contact with their family; the third group did not report feeling lonely.

Individuals who fell into the first group were in regular contact with family, receiving visits at minimum once a week, at maximum several times daily. Family contacts included daughters, grandchildren and siblings and in one case the individual was living with her daughter. However, loneliness was still a problem. In all but two cases individuals had been widowed. Reasons given by them for their loneliness varied. In one case, the contrast between visiting family and returning to an empty house brought it on. In other cases, the absence of wider social contact - the inability to get out and about because of ill health or retirement - was the major factor. For those who were married, one spouse was in nursing home care suffering from Alzheimer's disease, the other missed the busy social life he had enjoyed before retirement. But the most commonly attributed cause for loneliness was reported to be missing one's late spouse. This was true also for individuals in the second group who had no/little contact with the rest of their family.

In all, 77% of those widowed elderly people who felt lonely, either occasionally or very frequently, said that they did so on account of missing their husband or wife.

From this information, visits from family - daughters, siblings, nieces - would not appear to make a significant difference to whether or not an elderly person felt lonely. The most common cause for loneliness in old age, therefore, would appear to be bereavement of spouse, constituting the loss if an individual's greatest attachment. Although this feeling was most acute in the very early stages of bereavement, when it can be seen as desolation, among some individuals in this study it has persisted for years - the maximum reported being 25 years.

But what of those individuals who did not feel lonely? What characteristics did they possess? Firstly, all of those who were still married were found in this group. They generally expressed the opinion that they would probably be lonely if they were not married. Others, even though they may have had family calling in, related their lack of loneliness to the friendships they possessed. One said that she didn't get lonely any more because she had a friend who called in to see her every evening. Another said:

> "I've got a very good neighbour, but if I ever feel lonely I put my coat on and have a walk. I walk up to the top, to my friend's."

Others lived in sheltered homes, where the possibility of companionship was always at hand. Nor did those social contacts have to be with good friends or concerned neighbours; friendly acquaintances or people in the local shop could be valuable. As Katie, who claimed not to suffer from loneliness, said:

> "And I tell you what, the paper boy's quite friendly and the milkman and the girl that delivers the bread. You can pass the time of day with them. And my home help comes every other day and I get all the village news from her."

Friendship and contact with neighbours, then, appear to be very significant in contributing to a sense of social fulfilment among elderly people. Previous research has seen contacts with friends and neighbours as having a greater impact on wellbeing of widows than does contact with other relatives (Arling,1976). But it would not be entirely correct to draw this assumption from the findings reported here. Of all those widowed elderly people who were not lonely, 78% were in regular and frequent contact with their families, regardless of whatever friendships they may have maintained. On the other hand, 58% of those who were both lonely and not in regular contact with family also reported a high level of contact with friends - whether intimate confidantes, in the case of women, or a fairly wide social circle in the case of men - and the remaining 42% had neither family nor friends. In other words, it would appear that social fulfilment results from a combination of factors - contact with family, balanced with a neighbour or friend who's also an age-peer.

Indeed, as we have seen in this chapter, kin and kith have differing functions and purpose in the lives of elderly people. The function that each group plays depends very much on the circumstances of the old person's life. Where they have a) a daughter who b) lives close by, there will usually be a high degree of involvement with her in the life of her aged parent, on both a practical and friendship basis. Daughters perform practical activities like shopping or taking the old person out to shop. They share meals and holidays together. They chat on the telephone, clean and tidy the house, bring the old person a meal, invite them up for weekends or Sunday lunch.

Neighbours are particularly valuable for those elderly people who do not have daughters living in the immediate locality, or who are infirm. Then, neighbours will tend to take over some of the functions that otherwise fall to daughters, though carrying them out perhaps with less intensity and commitment. Neighbours are to be found performing any of the following activities for old people who live usually next-door or next-door but one, or across the street from them: buying potatoes, doing the hair of the elderly person, posting letters, going by and checking to see if there is a light on, or calling in to make sure everything's alright, fetching the pension, lighting the fire, helping during times of sickness.

Only 10% of the people involved in my study consciously distanced themselves from their neighbours. The behaviour of this 10% does not appear to be connected with class, moreover, but is rather associated with certain personality attributes: a very close involvement with family, the holding of independent ways.

As we have seen, not all old people of this locality differentiate between friends and neighbours. This is particularly so for women, most of whom never worked outside the home. In retirement, elderly men also tend to look upon their neighbours as the main source of friendship unless they are married in which case their main source of friendship is their wives.

As we have seen, those elderly people who do not have the social contacts they require or have been accustomed to over the years, suffer from loneliness. This study confirms the observation made by other researchers in the field (eg Johnson et al, 1987) that

loneliness is almost a universal feeling in old age. I have found no evidence to suggest that disengagement is willingly undertaken. The degree of loneliness experienced by my informants indicates to a certain degree the breakdown of traditional society as this generation has known it. Gone are such features as large interdependent families, frequently living under one roof into adulthood, and the neighbourliness that it was claimed once gave the area a rural characteristic despite hosting some of the greatest industrial works in the world (Brennan et al, 1954). Where loneliness has been seen as a comparative feeling, arising from the lack of social contacts as one once experienced them, so it is the acute contrast between past and present which affects the people of this area most. Not only has their society changed, but, as retired, elderly people - so has their position in society changed, a double shift, a double transition in their relationship with other people. Their loneliness reflects a deep vulnerability, along with the opening up of an immense vacuum in their lives. For many people, indeed, loneliness as they now experience it recalls the only other stage in the lifecycle in which they had been lonely - adolescence, when one is also imperfectly integrated into the world in which one lives, and where one is judged by this world as "marginal" and an "outsider". So Ivy, a highly resourceful and independent woman who raised a family singlehandedly after her husband died, maintained a career and in retirement travelled around the world on her own, aged 80 can say she gets lonely because "I'd like somebody to talk to sometimes..." And Ella, aged 84, felt the same:

> "You'd like to be able to talk to somebody and have a conversation, but you can't."

As she recalled, she had felt lonely in her teens too, but then the motivating feeling had been "Am I on my own? Am I not attractive?" as it is in old age: "Is there noone out there whom I can talk to?"

Researchers (Kalish,1969; Bengtson,1970) have been at pains to point out the similarities between youth and the elderly in so far as their marginalised positions in society are concerned It would also appear that this marginalised position has its concomitant in the individual perception of being set apart from other people, of being isolated and irrelevant - in other words, in being lonely.

NOTES

1. In this study, the term "social network" is used in the general and simple sense. Willmott (1987:4) provides a useful summary of the contexts in which this term can be used: "The term social network can be used in two senses. The first simply refers to the people that a particular person knows, whether they know each other or not. The second application is more complex and in some respects more useful: the people known are viewed as points surrounding Ego, and the metaphor of a net refers to the links between them. If the links are many the network can be described as close knit or dense, if few as loose-knit or less dense. The concept of networks has been incorporated into ordinary usage, but commonly without any conscious distinction being made between the two meanings and without any discussion about density."

2. see Wenger (1987) for similar findings.

3. Researchers have noted that friendships are usually maintained among individuals of similar status: (choosing their friends among their own sex, social class, marital status and age group) eg Hess (1979).

4. Jerrome has noted ways in which middle-class women sought to make new friends as their social worlds contract. The four methods she highlights - to deepen and extend existing friendships; to grow closer to siblings and cousins; to become full-time "good neighbours" or carers; to acquire friends through voluntary association - are all found among the working class women in this study: Jerrome(1981).

5. This has been noted in several studies of sheltered housing environments: eg Hochschild (1973) and Rosow (1970) .

6. This has been observed by Hochschild (1973) in age peer housing

7. This has been noted by several researchers looking at male-male friendship: for example, Tognoli(1980).

8. South Wales marital relationships, in a sense, straddle the divide between typical middle-class and working-class patterns observed in other parts of England: Bott (1957) for example showed that the typical middle-class pattern is one of

companionate marriage and shared friendships in contrast to the typical working-class gender-segregated networks. Perhaps one of the main reasons for this was the deep interdependence of male and female roles in this locality.

9. Wright (1989) argues that structural factors tend to favour women's friendships in later life but to work against men's; after men's work-based friendships are weakened at retirement, a void may be left unless they can be maintained through work-related pubs,clubs and leisure activities. For women, however, the major change as they age is greater freedom from children's demands and extra time available for existing and new friends. They are also more likely than men to replace lost friends with new ones.

10. American research has found that these arenas are fruitful places for striking up sexual relationships, but I did not find this to be true for this South Wales region.

11. Observations of Margaret Stacey (1960); Jerrome (1981) has noted a pattern in working class districts of keeping aloof from neighbours, for fear of exploitation.

12. This would correspond with the differences observed by Litwak and Szelenyi (1969) between friends and neighbours.

13. This observation agrees with that made by Rosow (1970).

14. Cantor's observation (1979)- that kin are considered the primary sources of help by elderly people and the most important function of friends and neighbours - is as compensatory support elements when kin are not available - remains true even where kin are rarely available, if ever.

15. This is also one method of maintaining their self-image as not-old. See Matthews (1979); MacRae (1990) points out that one of the most typical kinds of situations where the older woman may learn to think of herself as old is being with young people.

16. This has been noted by researchers such as Rubinstein (1987) who points out that never-marrieds do not escape the experience of loss in their lives and are likely to feel it acutely - in the manner of desolation - through death of parents, siblings, friends.

CHAPTER IV

INDEPENDENCE, DEPENDENCE, INTERDEPENDENCE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine perceptions and experiences of independence and dependence in old age. It will also consider exchanges and relationships characterised by mutuality, interdependence and reciprocity.

An understanding of the values and significance with which old people bestow the states of independence and dependence is crucial to an appreciation of the texture of life in old age. A method of interpreting the values and significance placed on them is by examining the nature of the relationships we identified in Chapter III, looking at the demands, negotiations, exchanges and expectations that characterise them. As we will see, the relationships into which old people enter can be characterised by feelings of helplessness and loss of control, as well as by increased power, self-determination and self-expression. They can perceive themselves to be demanding and burdensome, or else they can judge their relationships to be characterised by warm exchanges and an equitable balance between all parties. Old people's perceptions of these situations will necessarily have an immense bearing on the way in which they view themselves, on their perceptions of self-esteem and, more, on self-worth.[1]

Sections 4.2 to 4.4 will look at old people's definitions of dependence and independence which can be categorised in three main dimensions: a practical definition, relating to self-

care and domestic care and the extent to which they are autonomous in these matters or require the assistance of others; a financial definition, the extent to which they are financially self-sufficient; and a social definition, reflecting the extent to which they rely on the companionship of others. It also compares self-perceptions of dependence and independence in the three categories, in order to discover which of the three has more bearing in terms of overall perceptions of the self as dependent or independent.

Sections 4.5 and 4.6 look at dependence and independence in family relationships and relationships with friends and neighbours respectively, while section 4.7 looks at the special case of the spouse relationship, which appears to be characterised by mutual dependence. Section 4.8 and 4.9 differentiate between the experiences of old men and old women in terms of dependence and independence over the lifespan. Finally, section 4.10 looks at the connection with self-image and notions of self-worth in old age.

4.2 Definitions

Introduction

If we look in the literature we find many definitions of the term "dependence" and its opposite "independence"[2]. Dependence has been defined as:

> "A state in which actions by others are a necessary condition for an actor to achieve his or her own goals" (Qureshi et al, 1986:167).

It has also been explained in the following way :

> "A situation is characterized as dependent if an individual has no resources, is receiving without giving. This is evaluated negatively in western societies. Independency is similarly an asymmetric relationship, positively evaluated because of a surplus of resources" (Van den Heuvel, 1976:167).

Independence and dependence are also closely connected to issues of power in social relationships, and imply an imbalance in social terms, in contrast to the equality that springs from interdependence. Blau (1967:26) places dependence and independence in a particular relationship as follows:

> "Individuals and groups are interested in at least maintaining a balance between inputs and outputs and staying out of debt in their social transactions; hence the strain towards reciprocity. Their aspirations, however, are to achieve a balance in their favour and accumulate credit that makes their status superior to that of others; hence the strain towards imbalance."

It must be remembered that interdependency is the state that more usually describes society as it exists in the west. Arber and Ginn (1991:67) write:

> "Independence in political rhetoric is associated with freedom and choice and a measure of dignity, while dependence suggests a relationship in which there is an unequal distribution of power and a lack of alternatives. However, in reality society functions in terms of interdependency."

Dependency has been seen as falling into categories or areas with different meanings and values attached to the dependency that occurs in each category. Margaret Clark (in Cowgill and Holmes, 1972) for example, has noted five categories: socio-economic dependency (which occurs during, for example unemployment), developmental dependency (for example,during childhood, old age, pregnancy), dependency of crisis (for example, illness) and neurotic dependency (dependency as a character trait). Walker (1982) has identified five types: lifecycle dependency, physical and psychological dependency, political dependency, economic and financial dependency, and structural dependency. Van den Heuvel (Munnichs and van den Heuvel,1976) finds seven areas: physical, mental, emotional, cognitive, social, economic, environmental.

The social ideas attached to dependency are interesting to consider in that different abilities and inabilities are given contrasting values, depending on the category of society to which an individual belongs. For example, wheelchair users who cannot do their own washing and ironing are "handicapped" but "dependent" but middle-aged bank managers who cannot do their own laundry are considered to be neither (Johnson, 1990).

4.2.1 Old people's definitions of the terms

The elderly people in this study all had very determined, well thought-out ideas about what independence and dependency meant, in the context of their own lives. In most cases, elderly people presented me with their definitions of independence without hesitation[3]. They spoke with a conviction which seemed to reflect the fact that this was an issue to which they had given much previous thought.For all but reasons of sociability and companionship, independence was perceived in positive terms and so was claimed by the majority of my informants.There are several possible reasons why independence was so vigorously claimed by these individuals. Perhaps the strongest is the fact that many elderly people sense strong prohibitions against depending on others, even though they do not really know why this should be.

Edna said:

> "I'd rather give, I don't want to receive... I can't ask a kindness without I can repay it."

This attitude was widely shared. Western society does indeed place a very high value on the attributes of independence, self-help and self-sufficiency and the South Wales coalfield has also placed great stress on independence historically, with families having to make ends meet during frequent times of hardship. The way in which individuals went

about co-operating with one another and at the same time remaining autonomous was by taking part in reciprocal helping relationships. We must remember that the social and political background in which elderly people grew up included the absence of a Welfare State. As Gladys Elder (1977:30) expressed it,

> "They (old people) are sensitive to becoming the incubus they fear they may be to others."

The generation that parented today's elderly was subject to the full force of Gladstonian liberalism in an era when politics was avidly observed and discussed by the common people. Self-help and self-sufficiency was very much a part of the Liberal ethic. In his study of the formation of the Liberal Party John Vincent has pointed out (cited in Abbott, 1972, p16) that the great moral ideal of liberalism was manliness, the rejection of the various forms of patronage, from soup and blankets upwards, which had formerly been the normal part of the greatest number.

Gladstone was not interested in practical reforms. To him, social reform, or "construction" as he called it, was "taking into the hands of the State the business of the individual man." (Abbots, 1972:16). He believed in self-improvement.It must be remembered that Liberalism remained overwhelmingly strong in Wales up to World War One, for example in the General Election of January 1906 the Liberals captured every seat in Wales, except for Keir Hardie's return as junior member for Merthyr Tydfil (Morgan, 1982).

When asked to discuss the meaning of independence my informants produced practical definitions of independence, financial definitions and social definitions. The categories

in which the traits of independence or dependence were seen to fall were very significant for the elderly individual's assessment of the trait as positive or negative. Dependency was acceptable, even welcomed, in certain areas of life and deplored and feared in others[4].

The definitions given me by the elderly people in South Wales will be explored below.

i) The practical definition of independence

Independence in practical affairs was seen as basically comprising self-care and the ability to move about without help from any other and to carry out a series of basic practical activities[5]. For men it might extend to carrying out practical tasks around the home, such as small repairs, house maintenance and tending of the garden. For women it extended to the ability to carry out some housework, even if only light housework such as dusting and washing up. Among those elderly people I interviewed, 67.5% considered themselves to be physically independent.Though this compares very well with the fact that 33% of the group needed help with either personal or domestic care, the correlation was actually not so great - not all those from the 33% considered themselves physically dependent and vice versa.

Rosina said:

> "I'm not dependent on anybody. I am independent. I'd rather try and do for myself than ask anybody else to do for me."

It might be noted that perceptions of possessing "independence" in a practical sense did not imply that the elderly individual was totally self-sufficient in this respect. Physical

incapacity, even to a large degree, often did not alter the elderly person's perception of him/herself as independent. Anna, at 66, was severely disabled with a stroke, which had impaired her speech and mobility. She felt that she was independent because she took a lot of trouble over the few small things that it was within her capacity to tackle. She could wash her face and hands, for example, even though she needed her husband to bring the bowl to her.

In relation to circumstances which make some physically disabled people class themselves as dependent and others not so, the observation that when physical disabilities get in your way and prevent you from pursuing certain essential or much valued activities only then do they become deeply significant, seems to hold out here[6]. The proviso is that, at the same time, the individuals possess a sufficiently great will and yearning, struggling with determination to do things for themselves - even where this is extremely difficult.

ii) Independence as financial self-sufficiency

Some respondents automatically and primarily linked a self-perception of independence with the fact of their own financial self-sufficiency usually owing to the receipt of private or employment-related pensions. There were fewer respondents, however, who named this aspect of independence primarily when asked to discuss the term: about one tenth of my informants did so.

Mrs T- took this point of view. She praised her late husband for having been sufficiently "careful" to have saved enough money for her "rainy day". Of herself she said:

"Oh I am independent, praise God. I don't want charity off anybody, mind."

Financial independence was equally as important to Phyllis. She said:

"Oh I like independence.. I wouldn't ask my children for anything if I didn't have to. I've always lived on small money, and the money I'm living on now, I manage...."

Daniel John said:

"Financially. That's the way I look at being independent...What that means to me is that I can help people. Not only my family, but say next door... when they need a bit of money."

iii) Social definition

Many elderly respondents principally connected a self-perception of independence or dependence with the domain of social or family life - the extent to which they felt they needed or enjoyed the company of others. Those who enjoyed mixing with others readily admitted to being "dependent" and 30% of the elderly people I interviewed took this view. In the eyes of the elderly people who answered this way "independence" was synonymous with unsociability.

Menna, aged 83, from Ystalyfera, was quick to assure me that she wasn't independent at all and nor would she wish to be.

"I don't think that pays... I think you're selfish if you're independent. They (independent people) are not the same as you, they don't mix with everybody."

She went on:

> "I got a friend, she comes to me. And every time I join a class I say: "Come with me." "Oh no," she says, "I can't put up with them." "

Menna was very proud of not being "independent" with people. She added:

> "I've never been independent,see. At my wedding - you ought to see the crowd I had and the presents I had....."

Daro, a retired collier of 65, described himself as "definitely not" independent, because "I know most of the people, especially around my age." He felt that independent people were very unlike himself in that independent people are "loners, on their own, not lonesome" - which is, presumably, what he would have been if he were on his own (that is, lonesome).

Eunice said that she didn't consider herself to be independent:

> "No.. I'm a good neighbour, I think, and I think they all like me and I like them."

To be dependent, in Eunice's opinion, meant

> "to be sociable - be with people... it's like this.. if I go to the front door I like to pass the time of day."

She was not independent, she maintained, because "oh no, no, no.. I like to mix."

Will, a 90 year-old retired tin worker from Clyne, was not independent. He told me, with relish, "I don't like to be independent. Independent people are stuck up."

On the other hand, there were others who felt that, faced with the rare opportunities that remained for them to come into contact with others, it was necessary for them to cultivate psychological and emotional independence.

As Bonnie explained,

> "I don't want to worry nobody... To be truthful, you can't be too independent today. Because you've got to be alone, sometimes."

This was the only way in which individuals like Bonnie perceived that they could offset loneliness - to build up an emotional self-sufficiency to which they could cling like a raft.

4.3 Priorities and the pecking order of dependency definitions

Of all these areas of life in which it was possible to perceive oneself as being dependent or independent, some areas presented themselves as key to the question of whether or not one saw oneself as ultimately "independent" or "dependent". The area of life most crucial to an overall self-perception of independence was in the area of self-care and domestic abilities. It was most acceptable to be dependent in social/psychological terms. Out of the elderly people I interviewed 12.5% considered themselves to be physically independent and socially dependent at the same time but saw no contradiction in this position.

However, those individuals who were independent in the sense of being financially self-sufficient still judged themselves to be "dependent" overall if they were not able to carry out self-care or perform small practical tasks about the home.

Glanmor was one such individual. He said to me:

> "The only trouble I have is that I am becoming dependent. And I've never been dependent on anybody.. I have to be and it irritates me.. if I had money, I'd be off out of here now..."

He had sufficient funds to be able to pay for a live-in housekeeper. But he saw his problem as lying in the fact that he was "physically" dependent. He said:

> "It wouldn't worry me if I lived in a caravan and looked after myself. But I can't do that now."

As we have already discussed it is not requisite for an elderly person to be able to manage all practical tasks and all physical acts unaided in order to perceive him or herself as "independent" in this area. The perception of him/herself as "dependent" in this area begins when the elderly individual requires practical help to such a degree that it is no longer accurate to consider it only "help". Instead, the helper begins to take over totally in activities the elderly individual can no longer even attempt, then thereby losing their sense of control over the situation. It can also occur when physical limitation make the individual abandon altogether situations which were once much cherished - visits to people, outings, visits to the pub or shopping trips such that quality of life is affected substantially and their sense of power over their own life is drastically diminished. When basic abilities are lost this increases the feeling of dependence - as Phyllis, a vigorous, lively woman put it, with great despondency, "I can't light the fire, I can't bend, I can't go out shopping", as if this were truly an admission of helplessness.

4.4 Evaluations of self-perceived independence /dependence

Whether the elderly individual evaluates his/her self- perceived status, either independent or dependent, as positive or negative has much bearing on the nature of his/her self-evaluation in later life. We will consider this in more depth in section 10, below. But it is salutary to point out here that, as one might expect from the above account, a positive

self-evaluation is given to independence in self-care/domestic areas and a positive evaluation is also made on the experience of dependence in the emotional/social areas of life.

It might be added that self-perceptions of independence and dependence do not appear to be connected to gender directly, although of those who were prepared to define themselves as "dependent" whether in a positively perceived social/psychological sense or in a negatively perceived self care/domestic sense, the group included both men and women: approximately half of the men and only one-tenth of the women acknowledged being dependent in some form. The greater proportion of men here is apparently connected to the lack of opportunity men have to express their independence. For men, the work role is gone and with it much of their feeling of what is it to be independent. For old women, however, the "work role", centred on domestic activities is still available.

It must also be noted that elderly people truly did seem to talk in terms of self-perception. It was not principally a case of "others will consider me dependent" but on the contrary it seemed to me that they were certainly less lenient and generous in describing themselves than others would have been in describing them. It was more a case of "I can't do what I want to do." The aspect in which others' reactions were taken into account came with the urgent desire to avoid being a burden on anyone. Hence Bill who was "making sure I don't pester anybody"; Violet who said: "You don't want to rely on everybody all the time"; Ella who declared :"I do all I can do on my own, without worrying anybody else." Indeed, even where elderly people were concerned with looking at things from another person's point of view they often recognised the fact that their

own judgment of the situation was likely to be more harsh, less sympathetic than that of the others.

4.5 Family Relationships

Introduction

As we have discussed, for a significant span of the lifecycle, the generations that go to make up what is today a loose version of the extended family (Litwak, in Shanas and Streib, 1965) exist in a state of mutual dependence or interdependence. Rosser and Harris (1965), describing the closeness of the families in this area twenty-five years ago observed that the maintenance of the extended family was based on a reciprocal exchange of domestic services between the households that compose it. Mutual dependence or reciprocal help-giving is least likely to occur at either of the extreme ends of the lifecycle, that is when one generation is either very young or very old. Among the very old it has been possible for them to feel as if they are still part of a chain of reciprocal help-giving, one in which giving and receiving has taken place over the whole of the life-cycle and where help given and help received ultimately balance out equitably. However, in recent years it may be that this position is losing its moral authority to a very large degree[7].

A previous study (Hill,1970) has found that grandparents perceive themselves as both meagre givers and high receivers, almost in a dependency status, whereas the parent generation, in contrast, is high in giving and modest in receiving, occupying a patron-type status which, implicitly, is the situation rendering most satisfaction (in Blau's terms). This

situation does not in fact characterise the position of many of the elderly people in this study, as will be seen below. The first area we will explore relates to that of intergenerational living.

4.5.1 Intergenerational living

i) where both parties benefit

In Chapter III, we have discussed the extent and general nature of the practice of intergenerational living. Here, we will look at it in terms of the exchange that goes on within it. In some circumstances intergenerational living arrangements have been constructed in such a way that they served to benefit both the older and the younger generation, usually in different ways. Quite often the older person provides the accommodation, usually the family home, and the younger provides practical assistance in the running of the home; 6% of the elderly people in my study group fitted these circumstances. The younger member of the partnership is most commonly female, usually a daughter but sometimes a grand-daughter, and sometimes she has brought her spouse and/or children to live in the home of the elderly, usually female, relative. Where the younger partner is male, in all cases he is unmarried.

Constance's daughter had never left home and now helped her increasingly frail mother with the housework. Widowed young, she explained:

> "I was the father and mother then.. I looked after them, made all their clothes until they were 20. Up until now I kept doing it, but my eyes are gone now, I've got glaucoma... but I'm still doing a little bit."

Rosina's bachelor son similarly had always stayed at home and, again, supplied his mother with practical and emotional support. Both parties can be seen to benefit from the arrangement. Rosina and her son split the household duties as follows:

> "He does most of my cleaning - he did the washing yesterday and he ironed today.. I use the cleaner and do the cooking."

he expressed satisfaction at the way things had worked out: "I think its a good arrangement" she said, and said she liked to think that things would have been no different even if he'd married (though most likely they would have been vastly different.)

ii) The old-old and their dependence on the intergenerational arrangement

There is no doubt, however, that in the very advanced years, at least when looked at in a short-term perspective, the elderly family member is certainly the main and often the sole beneficiary of the intergenerational living arrangement. Sometimes, my elderly respondents perceived this as a positive experience, sometimes as a negative experience.

a) the experience viewed as positive

Only one respondent expressed total satisfaction at this situation: Margaret, a very frail wheelchair-bound woman of 91. However, although in objective terms she was dependent on help from her daughter and son-in-law in the realms of self-care and practical care, significantly she considered herself to be independent. This self-perception undoubtedly coloured her view of the experience. Her sense of personal independence centred on her strong will and determination to carry out small tasks and the distance she preserved from people other than family. She had been living with her daughter since she was 81, for ten years. Both her daughter and her son-in-law cared for her. Her daughter would

go down into town, for example, to do some shopping for her, while her son-in-law prepared her tea. This family appeared to be tightly linked: when asked to name the thing that gave her most pleasure in life, Margaret named seeing her young great-grandchildren and when asked to name the hardest thing she had to face since the age of 60, she named losing her own mother. She explained, with satisfaction:

> "My single bed is in the sitting room and the sideboard is handy with the drawers.. and I've got a TV."

Even then some dark fears crept into the back of Margaret's mind: she worried about being a burden, "Well you see - I might as well say this - I'm having water trouble, see." But she succeeded in pushing these fears aside and concentrated on the good points, telling me that although she could do nothing about the house "I'm very good sitting down" (that is in her wheelchair) and "I make very good pastry."

Furthermore, her daughter's

> "got a washing machine, she's like a jiffy, washing. I've been here for ten years - and I've still not wet the bed."

b) The experience viewed as negative

As we have seen from Chapter III, one-third of the elderly people involved in an intergenerational living arrangement viewed it negatively. One of the overriding aspects of this experience for most elderly people occupying a dependent position in the intergenerational living unit was the loss of their independence, which appeared to be conceived in terms of being their own boss, not having to answer to anyone,possessing the freedom to go about one's business as one pleased and to have a purpose in life separate to that of the younger family. The reverse side of the coin seemed to be fear and guilt of becoming a burden[8].

A cluster of different case histories illustrate the variety of opinions and experiences that exist in this situation. Bill was unhappy living with his step-daughter and being cared for by her (this is the way he put it to me, although he was mobile and healthy and able to carry out all the various aspects of self care and to perform practical tasks such as making meals unaided.) So deeply did he fear becoming a burden on his step-daughter, however, that he directed all his efforts towards arranging for himself admittance to a residential home for the elderly, an aim he was in fact able to achieve within the space of a few months. The situation of going into lodgings, he believed, was preferable to his present situation also because he wanted "nobody to chase around after me - not relations." However, there was an aspect to his relationship with his step-daughter which meant a good deal to him: she was not his "real" daughter. He said:

> "I'm not her father, see. It makes a helluva difference. Its just her husband and her together..."

Aware perhaps that this attitude was an emotional one, he tried to reason around it too.

> "The house is spotless clean, the food is good, I can come and go when I please, but... she's getting on a bit, see. She goes very moody."

It is likely that Bill was aware that with his step-daughter he had not built up what sociologists have termed a "support-bank"- or lifetime investment of giving and receiving support (Ingersoll-Dayton and Antonucci,1988) - on which he could now draw in his old age, and this consequently made him very uncomfortable.

Iris had a room to herself and a TV which her daughter and son-in-law had bought her one Christmas. She would retreat to her bedroom for peace and quiet whenever the hub of family life grew oppressive downstairs. Despite being in the thick of family life, like a teenager she felt lonely and alone, she said. Everyone seemed to be part of a couple,

except for her, her experience of dependence and consequent lack of participation in family business in this case serving to marginalise her in her own home.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, for those elderly people who did not live with their family, however close the links were, they expressed no desire to do so. It was not an arrangement to which anyone claimed to aspire: when talked about as a possibility, then it was portrayed as being the least bad among a set of bad options.

Daniel, a widower with a daughter and grandchildren, described his feelings as follows:

> "She's told me several times: daddy, you come to live with me. I've said, thank you very much but I prefer to live on my own. Because I can do what I like. I can have a little party in this room if I want. I can have a little lady in the house! And if I live with my daughter, I have to live by her orders. I can do what I like here."

Interestingly, a year and two stays in hospital later, Daniel was seriously considering the possibility of moving in with one of his grandchildren - but only as a last option and only, he declared, because they wouldn't allow him to live in a Home.

Agnes said:

> "Well, I'd rather live alone now being as I can look after myself. Because they've got their families, haven't they? I enjoy living alone. I go down to my daughter and she says: "Stay tonight, mam." But I don't want to stay, I want to go..."

Quite often, an old person expresses the wish to remain in his/her separate living arrangements for as long as possible: but at the same time they acknowledge that when the time came that they couldn't manage any more they would yield to some form of

shared living arrangement with family. Sal, for one, said: "If my grandson had his way I'd be over there now." But she declined, for several reasons:

> "Your friends are living near my place. They pop in - sometimes, as soon as one goes out, another pops in. But if I had to go, I'd go."

Proximity of friends, indeed, appears to be an inducement for many old people to remain in their own homes.

Katie said: "I prefer to live on my own. Because my friends come to see me.." Later, she explained the benefits for her of living alone. She said:

> "I can listen to music...when they're gone, and they're not there all the time, I can listen to whatever programmes I want to on the wireless or TV. I go to bed early if I want to. If I'm not too tired I read in bed for about half an hour. I don't have to ask permission. That's what I call "independence"..

She added:

> "I spent a week with my daughter in Gowerton. But I've got a little place of my own and I've got lots of photographs, lots of memories".

This draws attention to another aspect which induces many elderly people to stay put: continuity, which encourages one's sense of understanding of and control over the environment. Moreover, preserving a sense of continuity in old age appears to be very important for self-image in old age. Moving out of a familiar setting can often result in an elderly woman labelling herself as "old" for the first time,(MacRae, 1990) as if newly registering a condition of powerlessness and vulnerability.

A similarity has been observed between the status and condition of an elderly person living in the home of the family and that of the grandchild, in terms of dependency and powerlessness. Kalish (1967), listed the parallels between the roles of the elderly and the roles of today's youth: he saw that they share the plight of belonging to somewhat segregated groups, adjacent to the group that controls the nation and wields the power; both youth and old age find themselves (unpleasantly) stereotyped in ways that middle-age rarely faces; if youth is alienated so is old age.

One elderly grandmother reported experiencing a great clash with the grandchildren, aged 11 and 15, when they were obliged to share a bedroom for the first time in their lives, in order to give space to their grandmother. "The atmosphere was terrible" she said, and it was not long before she had moved back into her own home. It was as if, indeed, the children had perceived their grandmother to be in competition with them, challenging their own dependency needs.

The elderly women who live with family talked about their "single beds" as if this was significant to them, and certainly in itself it represents some kind of ritual return to dependent pre-or non-adulthood. Similarly it was significant that Iris should have compared the loneliness she felt to that experienced by a teenager, who wonders whether anybody will ever care for her.

We can extend this argument further to suggest that to become dependent in advanced old age signifies a reversal in roles and certainly from the point of view of society (as opposed to the old person her/himself) signals a return to a childlike state for the elderly

parent (Kalish, 1969), remembering that the relationship of parent and child is the most basic dependency relationship - in a way that is uncomfortable for both parties. And yet, indeed, there is a difference between the position of the child and of the elderly person which accounts for the discomfort generated by the situation in the course of a caring relationship: in old age the elderly person, unlike the child, will not experience progress in its abilities, only decline. Other difficulties for the elderly person relate to her need to preserve her adult dignity in the midst of possibly very personal care. Agnes, for example, would never consent to being bathed by another, not even a female family member. "Oh Duw,no," she said. The need for privacy is particularly strong among this generation and can produce real tension in a situation where it is combined with dependency. Agnes explained,

> "You know, my husband wouldn't undress in front of me for years and years. Until we went to a caravan and he had to then!"

She added, "I wouldn't undress in front of my grand-daughter."

Arber and Ginn (1991:141) have commented:

> "Only in childhood is the performance of such tasks by others seen as acceptable, and the inability of adults to carry out personal care may threaten the status and rights normally associated with adulthood."

Daniel expressed to me the opinion that the only people one can depend on are one's parents. With the death of one's parents there is no longer anyone to depend on. You can't depend on your wife and children because they depend on you. He said:

> "When I lost my father [his mother died several years before that] then I realised: you're on your own. When your parents are alive you've got somebody to fall back on."

This reflects his understanding of the downward movement in which help is supposed to travel in today's society.

4.5.2 Dependence on family members for practical help when intergenerational living is not taking place

a) Daughters

We have seen that comparisons between the amount and frequency of contact maintained by the daughters and sons of elderly individuals respectively reveal that the observations made by Rosser and Harris (1965) are equally as relevant today as they were more than twenty-five years ago. In 1965, in the process of carrying out a sociological/anthropological study of Morriston, an area which makes up part of the region studied here, they found among other things that the high rate of contact between children and their parents observed in the area is maintained chiefly by daughters. There was a higher percentage of old people living with married daughters in their survey. Married daughters were more involved in practical help-giving for their elderly parents than were sons.

For contemporary Britain, General Household Survey figures show that, in relationships other than those involving the spouse, women providing care in the same household spend nearly 50% more time caring per week than male carers. For those caring for elderly parents in another household, there is a consistent gender difference with about 40% more care provided by female than male carers (see Arber and Ginn, 1991).

My findings do not contradict these observations. 100% of those old people who lived with offspring did so with female offspring, in one case a stepdaughter in preference to a son. Where one individual lived with a son, he lived in her home and therefore in reality he lived with her, having never left home and benefitting considerably from this arrangement.

For those elderly people who did not live with their family, a married daughter often helped with household chores - indeed this was true for just under one-third of the elderly people in this study.

Arthur's daughter saw him four times weekly, for example. She shopped and brought him cooked meals.

Although Lil had a son and a daughter, it was her daughter who called round every day - bathing her, preparing her dinner, taking home her mother's big wash. Like Agnes, Lil was not happy at the degree to which her daughter had to help her with personal self-care: "She'll come and bath me.And that is one thing - one thing I don't like."

She appreciated the other activities her daughter did for her however.

> "And then she'll do the dinner. She'll take my woollies and all that. I like to wash my own underclothes. And she'll take my bedding and all that."

Emily's children all lived nearby - one daughter lived in the next street from her. The children had joined together to buy their mother's council house. Her daughter would shop for her or hoover. They telephoned regularly also.

b) Sons

Elderly people in my study group were less able to depend on their sons who visited less frequently - especially when there were daughters available, and performed fewer practical help-giving tasks as compared to daughters. Among my group of informants, not one son was involved with self-care assistance to an elderly parent[9].

Ella had two sons, both of whom were living at a distance from her. While, as a widow, she was subject to bouts of loneliness and depression she said she would not like to live with either of her sons - simply because they were sons and not daughters. She said: "I think one woman in the house is enough." She agreed that the situation would probably have been very different if she had had a daughter, "but I've got daughters-in-law." As sons tend to spend more of their time with their wife's family, so it would appear that they tend to put their wife before their mother - at least in the cases reported here.

Grace's son, who lived in Europe, had established the habit of coming to visit her once a year, around the time of her birthday. But this year, he hadn't come, owing to the fact that his wife was ill.

Agnes' son was caring towards her although he didn't engage in any hands-on care or allow the relationship with his mother to intrude upon the relationship with his wife. She told me:

"My son comes up every morning - he only lives down the road - except on a Saturday. Cos his wife's at home and he's good to his wife. He comes up, just to see how I am, except on a Saturday."

Indeed, it has been pointed out that the contributions of sons and other male helpers are more limited in terms of time, range of tasks and intensity (Stoller, 1990). When the need for assistance intensifies to daily household chores and personal care, sons often drop out of caring networks.

c) Other family members

Elderly people who do not have conjugal families of their own are often dependent on other family members for practical help and assistance. Elderly bachelors are dependent on a sister, elderly spinsters or childless widows depend on nieces or younger sisters; furthermore the above pairs often share living arrangements.

Phyllis depended on a sister, ten years her junior, to attend to most of her practical needs and also her social need for company.

Sal depended on a younger sister in a very similar way. She explained:

> "My sister comes everyday. She'll take the cleaner around for me, she's ten years younger than me."

Katie, who had suffered from asthma all her life, had built a natural dependence on sibling assistance into her daily life. She told me:

> "I couldn't spend a lot of energy. My sisters would come and give me a hand to do the cleaning..My eldest sister used to do all the blankets."

4.5.3 Reciprocity over a lifetime perspective

a) Inter-familial reciprocity

Reciprocity within the extended family was one way of preserving the autonomy of the family unit over the course of the years. When the elderly people in my study group were in their twenties and thirties the generations as well as the "neighbourhood" as such cleaved together considerably more than they do so now in the time of their generation's old age (work was localised, the communities were inward-looking, intergenerational living was more commonplace, as described in Chapter II). Sharing of dwellings occurred more then than it does now, though this is partly accountable firstly by the fact of the shortage of housing in the early part of this century[10] and secondly by the fact that today the shortage of employment possibilities means that many young people move out of the area, several parts of which are definitely showing signs of an increasingly ageing population.

Several elderly people who chose to live with their children among my sample had experienced a history of intergenerational living within their family. Often, they had lived with their mother or mother-in-law on first getting married and their own daughter had lived with them after her marriage.

Shared living arrangements were a common feature in many families; if not for my informant him/herself, then with siblings from the natal family. Dai, describing the death of his parents, made the following observations:

> "My mother died first. My sister looked after my father till he died. The other sister looked after my eldest brother. Then the house went empty after they died. They all lived there, see."

Agnes told me:

> "After I was married I lived with my mother and I lived with my sister-in-law. Everybody buys their own now. Everybody had apartments before."

Later, she was able to secure a house of her own, something about which she felt very happy. But her brother lived in their mother's house all his life.

> "It was a three storey high house. And my brother bought the house when he was married and had children. And he lived in the middle part and she used to live down below."

When her mother became ill, the family took it in turns to look after her.

> "Me and my husband was staying one night and my brother and his wife the next night, until she died."

Bonnie's life history fits into this picture of intergenerational living. She brought her first husband home to live with her family and, after her death, her second husband came back to live with her family. "Everything was agreeable," she told me. Her mother was the cook and she cleaned.

> "We were a happy family. My father played the organ and I played the piano."

One thing that Bonnie found very difficult to understand was my own attitude to independence - she found my desire to establish myself separately from my family and to maintain an independent life from them including living alone incomprehensible. "But you'll never get independence like that," she said, deeply perplexed, "because your mother and father are still alive."

For Phyllis the pattern of family help persisted into old age. Two of the sisters lived throughout their twenties in the family home, Phyllis remaining there to the present day. The girls were working locally and Phyllis explained:

> "My mother wouldn't let us do much work in the house. She did the cooking, the housework, everything. So we'd come home from the factory and my mother would have everything ready."

After she retired from the factory, she nursed first her mother through the latter's final illness, sharing this duty with her two younger sisters, and then her brother, who suffered from Alzheimer's Disease. Now, when her own health is increasingly failing, her younger sister comes every day to help her, as described above.

Family help, with or without shared living arrangements, down through the generations was a part of life for many, who were not accustomed to throwing themselves on the bosom of the state, as may be more the case for people brought up in the post-Welfare society. Katie's family continued to provide her with assistance and companionship even after her marriage. Her father used to bring down her shopping by bus (he lived in Aberaman; she had moved to Glynneath after her marriage) so that she didn't have to go out shopping (as noted above, she suffered from asthma). When her husband was out of work for two years she said:

> "My mother and father were so good to me, and my sisters were. We only had the insurance. I'd pay for my food and the rent and that was about all."

Also, her mother would come and clean the cupboards and take her children out for a walk.

It is not practical help alone but also companionship on the part of younger family members that is appreciated and returned by old people by some other form of help. Agnes' family visited her a lot and took her out on trips with them. For her 90th birthday, her family organised three separate "surprise" parties for her. Every Saturday,

she goes out to Neath shopping for the day with her daughter and son-in-law. In return, she has been very generous to them financially. She explained,

> "They've all bought houses, see, mortgages. Well, I'm trying to help them, to tell you the truth... They don't ask, mind. Not one of them have asked for a penny. When I sold the house I only kept £100 for myself. I shared it with the children."

Nor is this the limit to her giving. She told me, "If they go on holidays I pay for their petrol or something."

b) Contemporary attitudes towards life-cycle reciprocity

However much this system might have worked in practical terms for the past two and more generations, old people today seem to be able to place little faith in the life-cycle view of the balancing out of help given and help received, so far as the younger generations are involved. The way society appears to be organised today is that parents help their children and these children in turn help their own children (Kalish,1969). In other words, help-giving is expected to occur in a downward progression and there seems to be some idea in the modern mentality that it is at best irregular for help to pass upwards at the same time. Certainly it is considered less of a priority for help to pass upwards, to the parents' generation, than downwards, to the offspring's generation.

This downward-giving process necessarily contributes to the marginalisation and alienation of the older generation. It also encourages old people's perceptions of being burdens, their feelings of guilt and distress in requiring the assistance of younger people, in all of which their self-images fare badly.

Old people showed little faith in the notion that they were now receiving the help that they had administered to others during the earlier part of their lives and that this help was now fairly and equitably received. They appeared to be unconvinced that the balance was now being redressed as opposed to being burdensomely tipped in their favour. Indeed, even if they did harbour feelings that it was not unjust to expect some "return" on help given in the past, there was a bitter awareness that this may not be the way younger family perceived the situation. On the other hand, most elderly people were aware that there was little short-term help they could give their children. Those with good pensions were able to give presents or financial help, and many of my informants actually did help in this way. Moreover, household "gadgets" had transformed the situation. Katie said her children didn't ask her for help. She explained: "They don't seem to need the help. Everything is labour saving now." She felt that she had needed her mother's help more than her children need hers now.

It seems that the notion of time-staggered reciprocity does not receive much in the way of respect from fast-moving quick-changing modern society. Several elderly respondents struggled to articulate this feeling to me. Eiluned, aged 82, who was very frail, appearing much older than her age, tried very hard to "do" for herself and to be "independent". She felt a strong sense of social disapproval regarding dependence, as she said to me: "I don't feel it's right to ask people to help me." This phenomenon has been commented on by sociologists and anthropologists, for example Margaret Clark who, although writing about North American society, nevertheless made remarks that are equally as relevant to South

Wales coalfield society. She wrote(1972:270):

> "Our culture is strongly oriented to future and present, and past services rendered or aid given does not bind the recipient for long to a demand for reciprocity. In other cultures with different time orientations, strong obligations may persist into the present and even to unborn generations for good or ill done in the remote past - even to ancestors."

Even in these more traditional societies, such a view may today be changing in fact as much as the values in South Wales have changed. Takie Lebra (1979:350), writing about the situation amongst ageing Japanese women, observes:

> "The dependency of aging parents on their adult children rests upon a long-cycled chain of reciprocity involving two connected life-cycles, parental and filial... Cultural, structural, economic and demographic changes have attenuated the binding force of long-cycled reciprocity which would entitle the aged parents to the support and care of the filial generation."

Observers of other cultures note the same changes occurring in traditional mores and values. Levine (1986:222), for instance, writing about Mexico, observes,

> "In the face of steep inflation, widespread unemployment and economic stagnation, young people are increasingly hesitant to offer support, while older people feel less entitled to and more ambivalent about requesting it."

As in South Wales, other societies are experiencing the change in priority from helping parents to helping children as a priority. Writing about Japan, Anne Freed (1990:43) observes,

> " the rise of the nuclear family has introduced the new attitude that the obligation to one's children takes precedence over responsibility to aging parents, which was stressed under the old family system. Women are working in larger numbers, many to help pay for their children's education rather than to support parents."

This position is illustrated very clearly by the case of Mary who can fairly be described as a woman who has devoted her entire life to the service of others. The eldest child of

13, she began helping her mother at the age of five, when she would shop for the family on the way home from school and look after the younger children while her mother was busy with household chores. At the age of 16, she went into service for thirteen years, only returning when she was called home to nurse her dying father and brother. She also nursed her mother through her final illness. But now at the age of 84 she looks ahead at the prospect of death and dreads a long illness - she is sure that people would get "fed up of doing for you." The position on time-staggered reciprocity, on the long-term balancing out of help-given and help-received, is cloaked in considerable ambiguity. Thus, while the elderly person fears being a burden, at the same time he/she is likely to feel resentment when he/she fails to receive the help which she feels is her "due". This may reflect the contradiction between the values of two generations: elderly people were expected to help their own aged parents but at the same time recognize that there is no longer any social expectation that their children should help them. They often appear to be haunted by the idea that burdensome old people are put away in old people's homes by their families.

Lorraine was one elderly individual who felt a keen sense of injustice regarding the behaviour of her children towards her, particularly her daughter, to whom she had given much and now expected much in return. She explained that she had helped her daughter considerably in the past- helped her with the wedding expenses, helped her to pay her mortgage, helped her out with money. "She would take the clothes off my back if I let her," she said. But in turn her daughter had been remote and unfriendly, refused to confide in her mother and having secretly eloped to another part of the country was now scarcely in touch with her. "Look how she paid me back," Lorraine said bitterly.

4.5.4 Old-old age and the helping relationship

In old-old age, if not in young-old age[11] one might presume that the balance of the helping relationship where it does exist is in many ways likely to be weighted, at least in this part of the lifespan, towards the elderly individual on the receiving end. In many cases indeed they are the sole beneficiants of a helping relationship. But one of their greatest contributions is help with money and they often give considerable help to children and especially grandchildren at this stage, although this was not information that was very readily told me - indeed it was only after I'd been acquainted with my informants for some time that they offered me this information. This subject could be described as sensitive, though not so sensitive as to be "taboo". Although old people waited till they knew me better - at the very earliest during our second conversation together - they chose to bring up the matter and not once did I prompt them to do this. Once begun, they spoke openly about it, discussing the limitations of their pensions, they way they could afford to treat themselves from time to time, and amounts they lent or, more usually gave, to family members.

i) where the elderly person lives alone

Elsie provides an illustration of this give and take process. She relied on her daughter and son-in-law to visit once a week and take her out on car trips or for meals. She relied on the home care assistant to help with her daily needs, and on neighbours who called in regularly to see to shopping and the posting of her many letters. She had increasingly come to rely on her grandson during weekday evenings for support and companionship following the recent death of her husband. Three evenings a week Geraint made her dinner and sat and ate and watched TV with her, a fact which filled her with pride.

> "He'll read the Evening Post, ask me how I am - "Have you done anything silly today, gran? You sure?" - watch the TV, see to the fire, the ashes... Then he makes a cup of tea, we'll have a cup of tea together and a sandwich - depends what he feels like. Sometimes he doesn't have a cup of tea, but he still makes me one."

When her daughter's marriage broke up she offered her her home immediately, describing it as "the normal thing to do." Elsie did not see herself as occupying a powerless position, moreover, as indicated by her later resolve, following a family disagreement, to cut her two grandsons out of her will.

Stan's children visit him every week, taking him and his wife out in the car on daytrips. The girls help in the home and the sons-in-law would help with odd jobs and decorating but the "only thing" he felt able to give them in return, he told me, was advice.

This pattern continued, for aged parents living on their own, even when great distances were involved in travelling to see them on the part of their children.

Jack was one individual who had moved back down to his native Wales - to Sandfields Estate, Port Talbot - on his retirement and left all his children behind in London. Even so, his eldest daughter came down from London once a fortnight to visit. She would take her parents on a big shop, help around the house and take both her parents out for trips in the car. When Jack's wife was in hospital having a mastectomy, his daughter took a month off work and came down to live with him and to look after him. But Jack did not feel that he was able to reciprocate. Although he had helped them out with money in the past, his main contribution was to give them advice and he considered this to fall short of the help that was given him[12].

ii) in intergenerational living

However there were many elderly people who, occupying almost totally dependent positions in intergenerational living arrangements, were acutely conscious that they were unable to return the large amounts of help given them.

Iris said she was "very frustrated" about her inability to tackle any housework.

> "I used to wash up until about last September my left leg started to go funny... my daughter has to help me with a lot of things - I can't bath myself... it's not very pleasant."

Bill felt that by living with his step daughter he was being a nuisance and pestering his family. Speaking of his desire to leave this living arrangement and to live in a residential home he said:

> "I don't want anybody to try and nurse me, now that I haven't got long to go. I don't want any of the family to be messed up for life. I don't want to be a burden."

iii) Attitudes held by both parties in a help giving - help receiving dyad

The picture that has been painted so far might seem in some cases to be very gloomy indeed for both the elderly parent and their middle-aged children, where the old person is totally dependent on help and can give nothing in return. But this is not entirely an accurate representation. Clearly, where elderly parent-adult child relationships are characterised by positive feelings and strong affective links, as they are in many instances among my respondents, the relationship can be enjoyed greatly on both sides, even where it is characterised by great amounts of help-giving from one party[13]. Yet, the fact

remains that even in these circumstances the elderly parent is often deeply troubled by fears of being a burden, a nuisance, a drain on resources of time, energy and money.

Elvira recognized that her feelings on this score were not entirely based on any evidence, but they continued to influence her strongly and powerfully. She spoke with much conviction on the issue, declaring:

> "I wish I was dead, I'm telling you straight. What I'm worried about is that I'm a burden on somebody else.. I <u>am</u> a burden - on my grand-daughter and my daughter-in-law."

But when I asked her: "Do you think <u>they</u> think you're a burden?" she replied: "No, not the way they are."

Olwyn was in the habit of seeing her daughter once a week. Her daughter cleaned for her, took care of the washing and shopping and their relationship was clearly a good one because Olwyn said of the relationship: "We're the best of friends." But Olwyn was uneasy about the demands she made on her daughter. She said she worried about the fact that her daughter, as an only child, could not share the responsibility of her mother with any other sibling. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that her daughter's husband was also an only child, which meant that the responsibility for her parents-in-law also fell upon her shoulders[14]. She said:

> "Between the two of us, it's a lot, see? As I say, I don't want her to do a lot for me, because I can do a lot for myself."

It is true that middle-aged daughters- sometimes evocatively described as "women in the middle" (Brody,1981) - in particular can find themselves greatly under stress as a result of the twofold demands of their own conjugal families and of their natal families -

namely elderly parents. Elderly mothers, who have themselves cared for aged parents, are aware of the strains and pressures that can accrue to this experience, which has been termed "role strain" (Scharlach,1987), which consequently makes them less than comfortable about "producing work" for their daughters.

This does not apply only to middle-aged daughters caring for elderly parents. Another common situation is for elderly wives to be under considerable strain when caring for their sick or invalid spouses. I observed a good example of "role strain" in an elderly wife caring full-time for her invalid husband, who was also aged 75[15].In conversation with me she referred continually to the great demands her husband's illness had placed on her: "I haven't retired yet" she said, "I'm finding it a full-time job looking after my husband." She went on:

> "There are some 80, 90 year olds that are quite young at heart - I felt quite young till 70... but I've actually aged quite a lot since his illness."

Sometimes, she confessed, hinting at the strain she felt, her life was characterised by "black despair" - then, fortunately, "something comes and lifts you again."

Other elderly people who, in the later part of their lives, nurse an ailing spouse or sibling, are similarly affected by the experience. Olive, discussing the experience of nursing her husband said:

> "Oh, it was very sad. The nurse would call once a day but I'd do everything for him. I changed the bed, I washed him, I shaved him. He was paralysed for nine and a half years."

Moreover, their relationship changed, becoming something more akin to that between mother and child. She remembered,

> "He was like a child. I had to wash him, feed him, do his hair, shave him. In the morning he was confused and he'd call me "mama" - and in the evenings. But in the afternoons he'd call me Ollie,. he knew who I was then, see."

Ivy's experience of nursing her dying brother, coming very late in life for her, took a while to recover from. She told me:

> "I looked after him for several years and then when he died I felt lost. I used to wake up in the night several times and think: is that him calling?"

Phyllis was similarly rendered exhausted as a result of the four years she spent looking after her brother who suffered from Alzheimer's; she linked the onset of her own physical decline - what she saw as the beginning of her own old age - to this. Her sister told me that she had totally let herself go after his death, stopped washing and caring for her appearance and Phyllis confirms, "I went too weak. I was properly worn out. I was worn out."

Elderly men caring for their wives were similarly strained by the experience. When I asked Bill about the hardest thing he'd had to face since he was 60 he identified the following:

> "The hardest part was looking after my wife - doing for her - dressing her, undressing her, bathing her. Social Services were no help at all. She had arthritis in the spine. She suffered terrible and of course I used to suffer for her.I used to get her up, wash her, dress her, maybe take her out to the shop. That's all I knew."

As he took on full-time caring, the parameters of his world shrunk to the limits of that of his wife's. After retirement,

> "I looked after the missus 24 hours a day. That's all it was. Looking after the wife from the age of 65, 24 hours a day."

This is not to say that elderly men gain no emotional satisfaction from caregiving, as the men I got to know who had carried out this task certainly seemed to have gained satisfaction. It has been suggested that husbands may see caretaking as extensions of the instrumental role - an extension of the role of breadwinner (Vinick, 1984; Pruchno and Resch,1989)

4.5.5 Help-giving and receiving in grandparent-grandchild relationships

One relationship that elderly people appear to be extremely eager to keep fairly balanced and free of the "taint" of non-reciprocity in giving-and-receiving help is that maintained with their grandchildren. It appears that, while acquiescing however unhappily in the necessity of being dependent on their children, this was something they did everything possible to avoid in relationships with their grandchildren. In the South Wales coalfield area, grandparenthood is deeply fulfilling and satisfying for elderly people and it appears that they wish to nurture these relationships and preserve them from any of the fears or other negativities associated with the relationships they maintain with their own children[16]. When the grandchildren grow up, especially, they are seeking a relationship of equality and friendship. Where grandchildren may give to their grandparent in certain ways - company, small practical services - the grandparent ensures that he/she returns this lavishly - often with money or expensive gifts in order to arrive at an equitable balance, with neither side of the scale tipped up or down [17].

Where friendship is an important element of grandparent-grandchild relationships, there is a feeling of protectiveness and even collusion between both generations with respect

to the second, or parental, generation. Daniel John's attitude towards his grandchildren exemplifies this. He said:

> "When you're a grandfather, if you see your son or daughter slapping the children, you step in: don't do that! Don't do that! You would do that to your own children."

Evelyn maintained such a relationship with her grandchildren. Her daughter was visiting her every day at the time that I interviewed her. Her daughter helped with chores, doing anything that needed to be done. On the other hand, her grandchildren also came to visit her regularly - with the difference that they came to chat, not to do anything for her - Evelyn said: "I've got the home help for that" - and also, it would seem, her daughter. In recounting the nature of her relationships with her grandchildren, Evelyn was reminded of how much she used to enjoy going to her grandmother's house when she was a little girl - for bread and jam. She added that she enjoyed being a grandmother more than a mother.

Edna said about her grand-daughter:

> "She's helped me in heaps of ways! When she was a student and she didn't have much money, bless her, she bought me a cooker. Now she gets me things from Swansea you can't get here and she brings them up.."

In return: "I give her nice presents, the best I can really afford" - for example, Waterford crystal from a recent trip to Ireland.

Lorraine felt that her two daughters neglected her. However, she felt that she had cultivated a very happy relationship with her grandchildren, particularly her eldest grand-daughter, whom she felt had been "better to me than my two girls." Since Christine was

living in Derby, unfortunately they did not often meet, but whenever she did come to visit they would take Christine's children to the beach and spend "a very pleasurable afternoon together."

Many grandparents report helping their grandchildren out financially. Jack helps his 31 year-old grand daughter, who is married with two children.

> "Sometimes my grand-daughter gets into a bit of difficulty. He [her husband] is a champion of Europe, power-lifting. Poor bugger, he's fetching home £70 a week. Now, I'm getting more than that - me! That's how I look on life - how unfair it is."

Daniel John too has lent money to his relatives, but his grand-daughter most of all.

> "She comes to me, "Dadci, dadci... I'm in a bit of trouble. I owe this and owe that." "

When Daniel John lent her £1000 she started to pay him back £100 at a time - "I said, "No, forget it.""

4.5.6 Helping relationships and mutual dependence patterns practised among siblings

As we have seen, sibling links appear to be very important in South Wales, particularly for the elderly widowed and for those either married or never married who do not have children. Younger, fitter siblings are often in the position of giving help to older siblings, but wherever possible mutual help-giving and help-receiving is practised, and this is understood by both parties to be set within the perspective of a lifetime.

Mrs T-, whose collier husband had been dead some years, was in close contact with her sister-in-law still. I first met Mrs T- at Trem-y-glyn day centre where she had come as an escort for her sister-in-law, who was partially sighted.

Mary and her brother - seven years her junior at 77 - were the only two siblings out of 13 who never married and they effectively stayed at home. For much of the latter part of the lifespan they have functioned as a team, sharing the duties between them as necessary, as she explained.

> "Like, he's been in hospital a few times. I've always looked after him, I've always done everything for him: washing, ironing, everything when I could do it. I can't do it now and he helps me."

That is,

> "he gets up in the morning, he lights the fire. Then he takes the hoover around. Well, it only means that I've got dusting to do."

The life-time perspective reveals the true relevance of Minnie's relationship with her siblings. Having, as a younger sister, followed in their footsteps into the teaching profession, having as she put it, "guided her life" by that of her elder sister's, who was a Head Mistress, as Minnie herself was going to become, in their old age it fell upon Minnie to give them practical assistance. In the very last years, the relationship between Minnie and her sister became one of carer and dependent, with her sister becoming increasingly frail and confused. Upon the advent of the latter's death, Minnie alone remained living in the family home. She said to me: "I no longer have the worry of the responsibility for my family." Phyllis, as we have already noted several times before, shares a close relationship with her sister and one that is characterised by a good deal of help-giving on the part of her younger sister. Not content with accepting this in a life-

time context, Phyllis gives back as much as she can in the present term. As she explained:

> "She brings me all my meals down. I haven't got to buy any meat or veg or anything like that. At the end of the week I do push something in her pocket, I do give her. But she doesn't like it."

Even so, Phyllis continued to worry about the demands she placed on her sister.

> "I do worry now that I'm a nuisance. I do think: she's got me on her hands. She don't grumble but I do feel for her in that way. When I do see her coming down the backs with my washing and the dinners I do think: "Poor old Joan. There's a nuisance I am.""

4.6 Independence and dependence with respect to friends and neighbours

4.6.1 Those who live in sheltered accommodation

In sheltered accommodation elderly people depend on neighbours for friendship and for help in practical activities. The following pattern was often observed to exist: a pair consisting of two women in daily or usually many-times daily contact, one woman being younger and fitter than the other and essentially fulfilling the role of helper with regard to the older woman. There was little opportunity for reciprocity in this type of relationship, but this appeared to induce no feelings of guilt or anxiety on the part of the receiver. The age difference seemed to make this sort of relationship acceptable, because age in itself seems to be accorded status in a community of old people -as long as it is not accompanied by senility (see Hochschild,1973). Where it was not acceptable, and did lead to feelings of shame, embarrassment, guilt and frustration among some, was among age peers, where there is often a feeling that reciprocity should be practised where possible and that people should "keep up" with each other. Some case studies below may serve to illustrate this.

Sal was living in a complex of old age flats at the time I interviewed her. She told me that while she had plenty of friends popping in and out of her flat all day, one special neighbour did all her shopping and fetched her pension for her.

However, Bonnie's physical incapacity impeded her from socialising with her age peers at the sheltered flat complex in which she lived, even though many of them had been neighbours from the village in which she had lived before coming to the apartments. But under these new circumstances she held back from mixing fearing becoming a burden on them,her contemporaries, because she had trouble walking.

Elderly men, however, did not appear to fit into the system in quite the same way, although special times of crisis such as sickness would produce a flurry of activity in their direction with neighbours gathering round to do shopping or fetch pensions.

Gordon illustrates the position which elderly men occupied in sheltered flat complexes in this region. He explained that he usually only came into contact with the other residents of the sheltered home down in the day room. However, friends from the day room - all women - would call into his flat if he were ill and would help with his shopping and laundry.

4.6.2 Those living in the community

A very similar pattern persisted here, again involving a dyad of older/frailer - younger/healthier individuals - again mostly involving women. It was not uncommon for

a woman neighbour, usually younger and fitter, to be giving help to an old man, but two old men never appeared to make up a helping dyad. A dyad of old men did indeed frequently enjoy a friendship relationship, but help-giving was not a component of this, which essentially involved socialising. There was very little evidence of mutual interdependence in practical terms, and one neighbour would invariably take on the role of helper or even carer to another neighbour.

Ethel's next-door-neighbour, at 80, was ten years younger than herself. The friend was present when I called round to interview Ethel, and Ethel asked her to stay to give her support and also to help her answer the questions - "because you know about my life better than I do." In this case, the supportive function which her friend carried out extended to helping her to maintain a continuity of identity. Ethel's friend, in knowing her for so many years, ensured that Ethel's old identity - for example as a young married woman - is preserved. Outsiders, on the contrary, man tend to judge Ethel by the appearance she presents now - namely an old woman. Ethel's friend called in several times a day to see to practical things for her, though Ethel was unable to reciprocate, and Ethel looked upon her as her "best friend."

Olive had enjoyed the vigilance of a younger neighbour - until this neighbour became herself too old and frail to help. She explained,

> "My neighbour across the road was marvellous. She used to come over every morning to see if I was alright. She had the key to come in and if I was a bit late getting up she'd be in the passage: "Are you alright?" For years she did it. But now she's nearly stone blind and she's walking with a zimmer. And she's years younger than me."

Howard was an 81 year-old widower and double amputee who was being intensively cared for by the home care assistants on the Staying at Home Initiative, and by his next-door-neighbour. The services the latter provided for him ranged from shopping to looking after his finances, to providing companionship and moral support during his frequent bouts of depression. When Howard's invalid wife was alive, the next-door-neighbour played a large part in her care. But when I questioned Howard as to whether Margaret ever asked him for help he replied: "No. I don't think anybody asks me for help."

4.6.3 Reciprocity

As we would expect from the literature on equity theory and exchange relationships, the ability to reciprocate continues to be a very valued aim among elderly people where immediate or deferred exchanges of help-giving and help-receiving bring a sense of satisfaction and where relationships of all kinds, and in particular friendships that are asymmetrical in this area are uncomfortable (Rook, 1987; Roberto and Scott, 1986). Indeed, sociologists have cited reciprocity as a crucial element of well-being in old age and the state of indebtedness as extremely aversive:

> "The importance of reciprocity in human relationships cannot be overestimated " (Ingersoll-Dayton and Antonucci,1988:565)

The form of help given does not have to match the help received which allows great flexibility in the process. A very common example of this kind of pattern is when the older, frailer individual returns help received through the giving of presents and money. Takie Lebra (1979:337) writes:

> "to the extent that dependency is exchanged in reciprocal terms the two parties involved can remain autonomous, free from guilt, shame, or obligation of submission."

Examining the attitudes of elderly people towards reciprocity in their dealings with friends and neighbours can indicate the very high value placed on this form of exchange both by those who can reciprocate and by those who cannot. It can also indicate the varied ways in which reciprocating can be perceived.

Sal's neighbours shopped for her but she could not reciprocate.

> "I can't offer them help can I? I'd like to be able to give help. I'd like to go back to, say, six years ago - I'd do anything for anybody then."

Elsie told me that the only way she had been able to help people at times was by listening to them when they wanted to confide in her. She told me:

> "I know I can't help people back. The only way I can help people on times, which I have felt over the years - they'll come here and they'll talk. They know it won't go further. I just sat and listened sometimes, that's all. Just let them talk it out."

On the other hand, the current major helping relationship in her life is something she feels she has already contributed to in the past. She explained that she has a friend and neighbour, Owen, who comes in to help her, doing "little things, not big" such as sealing the window, posting her letters. Although Elsie has no way of reciprocating at present, she told me that her late husband, Bob, "used to help him such a lot. And I think that's a lot of it, with them." Apart from "showing her appreciation" at Christmas and birthdays, she doesn't do a lot else; because of the help Bob had given them in sorting Albert's pension out she felt "It's balanced. I don't feel obligated, no." Mrs T- said that

she couldn't give anyone help, "only with my experience in life, if they want advice... that's help in a way."

Vera felt the same. She reasoned,

> "Sometimes they might talk to me, ask me for advice, and I can help them in that way, "

although one does receive the impression that old people are not entirely convinced that advice giving is enough to equalize the exchange.

Daniel John's neighbours were very helpful towards him. One day, he was stuck in the bath, unable to get out, and alerted by his knocks on the wall they immediately came round to help. In return, he enjoyed giving things back - at holiday times, a bottle of brandy for instance - and persisted even though they tried to prevent him.

Moreover, crisis situations apart, they have a meal ready for him when he returns from his once-weekly day out at the daycentre. ""Dan! Stew's ready! Come and fetch it!"" he recalled, of the previous day.

Giving gifts of money and presents can certainly satisfy the elderly person that they have kept their side of the bargain. Mary has a neighbourhood friend some 25 years her junior, in her late 50s, who helps her considerably in many ways - fetching her pension, doing any shopping she needs, looking after her when she's ill. In return Mary told me

> "I don't know whether I'll be putting my foot in it, but nowadays I make her take money. She didn't like it in the beginning, but I do feel - she does my washing for me,my ironing for me. Well that's a big thing for me."

Mary times the moment she makes this gesture very carefully, in order that it will be accepted, putting it with the newspaper money which Doreen comes to collect from her. Then I say: "Come on now Doreen, you've got to take this." Rachel feels better too if she can return her neighbour's help in this way:

> "If I've got eggs and milk, I give her some. Christmas I bought her a dress and a nice waistcoat. I give them good presents."

Olive does the same, buying gifts for helpful neighbours on their birthdays and at Christmas. To the girl who drives her to the whist drive every week she gives vouchers from Marks & Spencer. She also gives little things to the home help as tokens of her appreciation - kidney beans or a pot of beetroot from her garden.

4.7 Mutual dependence and the spouse relationship

4.7.1 In early life

We have already described, in Chapter II, how the lives of men and women are highly interdependent, a pattern which has grown out of the conditions of the men's working lives.

But this is very much seen as a two-way process: not only have their wives contributed much to the running of the men's work-centred lives, but a great many elderly men claimed to have helped their wives about the house during the period of their working lives. Considerations as to whether or not this constituted "token" help in some cases is perhaps less important than the fact that the men, in making these claims, express a commitment to team-work.

I shall confess to entertaining a preconception here such that the actual evidence surprised me greatly. I had assumed, incorrectly, that this area of South Wales, with its great number of working men's clubs and pubs and its general air of "laddishness" would be host to the idea that housework was "women's work" and none of their concern, and they would certainly be reluctant, at the very least, to help their wives in this task. However, while a clear acknowledgement of duties as male and female work did occur many men I spoke to had been willing to assist their wives in "women's work" during the period they spent in the home including help with the children when these were growing up and did not consider it a slight on their manliness in any way.

Arthur, a retired steelworker, did the washing up throughout his working life. He also fetched the coal and chopped the wood - "My wife did the dusting," he said. But now, following a stroke, he was unable to do any housework and this seriously dismayed him.

Raymond, also a steelworker for most of his working life, told me that he'd always done a lot about the house. He worked shifts and explained "I've always done the dishes if I could - (but) I wasn't always there.. " He said:

> "I did the hoover, I've even pegged out the line for her. We always worked together."

Others did appear to be of the opinion that what they were doing was "women's work" and were a little ashamed, although this did not stop them from getting on with it anyway, perhaps keeping it from their friends. Jack said, jokingly, "If I had a spare moment, I'd wash up.. Don't tell anyone will you?"

Those men who did nothing to help with the housework during their working lives were rare. In some cases, the wives did not want them to and jealously guarded what they considered to be their preserve. Ethel explained:

> "There was no need. I was very capable at that time because I had very good health."

Ella felt the same.

> "I was one of those managing sorts of women and I sort of got on with it. You know, he used to paint and garden... I remember him washing up <u>once!</u>"

(a comment which was made without any resentment - indeed, with a certain amount of pride).

<u>4.7.2 In old age</u>

This mutual dependence continued after men's retirement with most men increasing their contribution to housework and many of the rest beginning to contribute for the first time. Also, in several cases where women found themselves becoming invalids, the husband was obliged not only to attend to the wife's personal care but also to take over the running of the household. Although this is more rare than the incidence of women caring for their sick spouse, the fact that it can occur for men shows the extent to which male-female dependencies are interchangeable (although this is apparently largely confined to the spouse relationship, at least in so far as men are prepared to take over activities from women).

Elsie became a chairbound invalid owing to osteoporosis. Her husband, who had retired early, stepped in. He "took over the running of the house..." she explained to me. "We were quite happy and content about that," adding as an afterthought, "Perhaps we were lucky, I don't know."

Anna, disabled from a stroke at 66, found herself in very much the same position. Her husband now did all the housework and cooking, and attended to Anna's personal care.

Mary's husband, who had done nothing up to that point, was forced into housework following his wife's confinement in a wheelchair. She said to me: "He didn't before. Now he's got to do the lot."

4.8 Independence, dependence and the experience of women

Women have been socialised, in this particular society and this particular generation, to be nurturant and to fulfil nurturing tasks. Caring for others has been one of their principal duties[18]. The need to give service to others remains very significant into old age. This is reflected in the type of employment undertaken by the women who worked outside the home at some point in their lives: the biggest employers of female labour in 1931, for example, was the service industry.

In the case of Ivy, at 80 she was fortunate enough to have sufficient energy and vitality left over after she had done her own shopping and housework to be able to help with the shopping and housework of others. She spoke to me of several "old people that I've

been round to." She said: "There's an old lady whose husband was ill and I used to go round there."

While it is, conversely, very difficult for elderly women to be on the receiving end of a helping relationship, they see the contradiction here with their own happiness in giving service to others.

Ethel, aged 91, remained a conscientious housewife up to the present day, and had been involved in the WVS and other voluntary organisations, all her life. She explained to me her feelings about not wanting to trouble people. She said:

> "I've always felt I don't want to be a nuisance. And yet, I shouldn't feel that way because I love doing things myself for people.

4.8.1 Women whose family circumstances have rendered them independent

Some women felt they had been independent in one of the three forms defined above all their lives and they saw this as stemming from family circumstances. Sometimes they were the oldest child in the family, or else their whole family had been fiercely independent. As we have already seen, self-sufficiency - of an individual or a family unit - is a quality that is highly valued in this society anyway.

Margaret, aged 90, was frail, incontinent and wheelchair bound. She was fond of singing and very interested in talking to me despite the difficulty she had with hearing and speech. She explained to me that her spirit of independence stemmed from the fact that

"we were eight in the family home and I was the eldest." Now dependent on her daughter for practical care she said: "I try not to make work for my daughter."

Minnie learnt to be independent and self-reliant because of the example set by her family: "we've been a family in a detached house with nobody absolutely next door." Still, the skills she learnt as a young girl, which were to make her so independent in her old age, were put to the benefit of the whole family while they were alive, thus fulfilling her need to give service to others. For example, she was the first "lady driver" in Cwmavon, but this fact did not distance her from the rest of her family - on the contrary, she explained, "I was driving the whole family around." In her advanced age, Minnie continued to be extremely independent and self-reliant, but at the same time, actively involved in the helping of others through clubs and voluntary associations.

Vera cited independence as one of the values taught her by her parents.

> "I was brought up to stand on your own two feet and go to the limit as far as you can...have a go, try."

Mary, as the oldest child of thirteen, was independent at a very early age. The first thing she said to me, in our very first conversation, was, "I've been an independent person all my life." She had worked to support herself and the family all her life.

> "Well I had to look after myself because we were told that if anything happened, the workhouse was for us"

(she admitted this was only a saying designed to frighten youngsters, although still capable of arsouing an emotional response.) She said,

> "I've always had to look after myself. And I've always looked after myself. And I've never asked anybody for anything."

4.8.2 Women who gained independence in their widowhood

Liberation of women from certain all-embracing roles such as wife or full-time mother generally can only come about in the second part of the lifecycle. They do experience a liberation from restriction, duties, expectations. This is not the same occurrence as "women's liberation" for younger women, because it evolves naturally within the existing social structure as the result of the death of their spouse and the forming of separate households by children. In the case of the unmarried women we have seen, liberation for them came only with the death of their natal family.

But many of the other elderly women in my study learnt to experience independence only by being precipitated into it via widowhood. This was particularly notable in the case of women who had become widows at an early age. As we have noted in Chapter III, several women widowed young transformed their lives in a very positive way as a result of the experience. Some learned to run the home and care for their children singlehandedly, to go out to work for the first time in their lives and to rely on their own company or to create for themselves a new social life[19].

Constance, aged 82, was one example of a woman who had gained her independence at an early age, as the result of the death of her husband, and who had learnt to manage her household and run her own business as a tailoress from home. She was very proud of her long-time independence, calling herself "entirely independent". She explained that independent people

> "like to do things for themselves and they don't bother anyone else and they've got minds of their own and they do what they want."

Ivy also had become a widow at the age of 40 and found herself hurled into the position of having to support herself and her family single handedly. Forty years on, and she claimed that independence had become a "habit" with her. Ivy's experience was of

> "being a widow so long I got used to doing my own thing... I did decorating, I did my own ceiling a couple of years ago.."

She was concerned to feel psychologically and emotionally self-sufficient too: not wishing to burden her children with worries about her loneliness she took the step of arranging outings and holidays for herself even though she had moved down to Wales in the first place to be near them. This appears to be a very subtle kind of balancing act. She explained:

> "I didn't want to make them think that they had to give up their time and come and keep me company, so I booked up things for myself."

Edna was a young and very resourceful widow who brought up first her own children then her grandchildren, as well as going out to work for many years. Edna relished the control over her own life that independence gave her . Now she lived alone, saw to her own needs with a little help from the home care assistant, and tended her large garden. Content with her own company for most of the time she appeared to be psychologically as well as practically, independent. She told me:

> "I'm definitely independent, extremely independent....Its everything to me... if I lost my independence I may as well die straight away."

To her independence meant being able to do things yourself, to be able to look after yourself" so you "don't have to bow to anyone." That was the reason she preferred to pay for the amount of home care she received because then "I'm not obligated."

Women who saw themselves as being independent expressed disapproval - perhaps tinged with envy - of those women who had been "cosseted" by their husbands so that they did not learn how to be self-reliant. Such women, they felt, would be lost and unable to cope when they became widows.

This was the view of Ella, who claimed that she had made sure she looked after her own individuality and capacity for self-expression and self-determination throughout the time her husband was alive. For example, she was involved in her own religion, she worked two or three nights in a voluntary capacity and took evening lessons. She described "dependent women" for whom she appeared to feel some scorn, as women who "have always been nursed by their husbands" - they should have learnt such technicalities as managing their bills when their husbands were alive, but they did not (rare in this locality, but presumably it does occur). So "when the husband dies, they're up the creek."

4.8.3 The experience of relying on home helps

One area in which women of this region have been highly independent is that relating to housekeeping and upkeep of the home, which was their "job" with help ffrom the family contributing to this in the same way that going out to work and bringing home the pay packet was the husband's job. This aspect of the ageing experience for women will be looked at more thoroughly in Chapter V. But for how this bears on the issue of dependence and independence in old age we can note first of all that many women in South Wales persist in attempting to do as much housework as they can, despite increasing frailty, decreasing mobility and in some cases debilitating physical disabilities,

such as arthritis, strokes, heart conditions. Even where women have external sources of help on whom they can call - wardens of sheltered accommodation, home helps, daughters - they continue to struggle on in such areas as they can still manage.

While elderly women can still manage at least some areas of housekeeping it remains possible for them to consider themselves "independent". The continuing possibility to rate oneself as independent in practical terms is, as we have seen, a very important factor in the maintenance of a positive self-evaluation.

Those women who were accustomed to seeing independence as an essential element of their self-image but were unable to do the large amount of housework they expected of themselves found themselves extremely frustrated by the situation. Constance said:

> "I've always been very houseproud and now I can't do these things and it irritates me."

For some women, the urge for independence is so great that it leads them to tackle activities that they may know rationally to be too much for them. And yet still they are driven by the greater desire to manage their households in a way they once did. These contradictory impulses are very commonly found in old age - the conflict between continuing to see oneself as able to do the things one did in middle age and the yielding to the new circumstances that present themselves in later life. Again, being widowed and not having a partner is a contributing factor here; a partner might otherwise help put into perspective what the elderly woman can and cannot do, acting as a check or restraint on unrealistic ideas and self-images.

Bonnie recognised this conflict within herself when she told me how her attempt to tackle cleaning had almost resulted in her physical collapse. She said:

> "Take last week, I was too independent. I wanted to clean the fridge, but when the warden came in the afternoon she had to finish it for me....I can't bend down, you see."

Lil expressed the same feelings. She considered herself to be very independent,a feeling not diminished following an unsuccessful hip operation which left her confined to a wheelchair. She said: "I'll do something I know I shouldn't.. rather than ask somebody."

Some women, such as Edna, who have acquired a very fierce taste for independence, find it extremely hard to receive even a minimum of home care assistance. Even though Edna was approaching 89 years old, and had difficulty with her eyesight, she found fault with the home care assistants whose standards of cleanliness were not as high as her own. Other women, however, yielded to the necessity of receiving such assistance without it appearing to cause them undue inner turmoil or anguish.

Evelyn said that although she dusted and washed up, she "enjoyed" her home help coming in as "She's a lovely little girl."

Eunice too expressed the opinion that she was "very glad to have a bit of help." Katie, who was a lifelong asthma sufferer, had accommodated the necessity of receiving help into the pattern of her life and consequently had no trouble in adjusting to thrice-weekly visits of a home help. "I never had time much to look after the house." She said she was "happy" about her home help: "We're friends."

Other women can accommodate the experience of receiving home care into a self-perception of independence by seeing that they cancel out the "debt" of the help given through paying for it. Sal was about to receive a home help for the very first time on one occasion that I spoke to her. She expressed her feelings about it to me:

> "Now I've got to rely on somebody to clean and wash for me, that's something I can't do now. But I wouldn't like to be obligated to anybody, then. I'd rather pay and have somebody done it and finished with it. It doesn't make me less independent, though. They come and go, I suppose."

Phyllis did feel uncomfortable about the help she received from her home help even though she contributed financially to the arrangement. "Though these home helps are getting good money I feel very obligated."

She attempted to give a gift to one of the home helps but Phyllis told me, "she said she's not coming here if I do. " Olive's way of incorporating assistance with the home into her daily life was by treating her home help as if she were a neighbour or friend coming into help and by reciprocating with small gifts.

These findings concur with other studies (Gregario,1986), which found that elderly people who seemed to have the most difficulty in accepting help were those who had always been independent and had been struck down in some way by ill health. The majority of people, though, had a practical attitude to receiving help if they needed it, since the necessity of receiving help had come to them gradually, over time. Others were able to turn it into an equal exchange by paying for the service.

4.9 Men's experience of dependence and independence over the lifespan

4.9.1 Independence in old age and middle age compared

Men in this culture have been accustomed to earning their livings in a harsh, brutal and dangerous environment, whether mines, steel or tinworks. When they returned home after a working shift, the caring, feminine environment of warmth, light and the smell of cooking emanating from the domestic environment created by their wives was a metaphor for the family life they held in great esteem; the prize that made sense of their working days. During the working day, however, self-reliance based on physical strength and courage, combined with a particular camaraderie shared by workmates determined the attitude that men held towards themselves for most of their lives, up to and including old age. Thus, in many of the responses towards retirement expressed by the men in this study, the high value accorded to physical and practical self-reliancy was very marked.

Jack declared himself to be very independent. He pointed out that if he had a problem, he wouldn't ask somebody for advice, he'd go to the library and look it up.

Similarly, Dai "Butch" considered himself to be independent. He explained:

> "If I can do anything on my own, I'll do it. I'd rather do it than ask. I'd never ask."

Jack observed that his wife, on the other hand, was much more dependent as a personality. She was quite happy to ask others for help; for example, if she couldn't sew on a button she wouldn't even try to do it herself she would wait till her daughter came down. She had always been this way, he said.

Independence continues to be highly valued in retirement and is often shifted to areas of life other than those which defined independence in younger years. It may be noted,

indeed, that retired men of this area take a great pride in their financial independence - something which they have acquired, after all, as the result of years of hard work.

Jack felt that the advantage of retirement was that "I had a pension for life, see - and a good pension - that's half the battle."

Daniel John's financial circumstances were such that he could "help people out" - something which gave him great pleasure. Also, his financial circumstances enable him to give things to neighbours in return for the help they may have given him.

4.9.2 Men's attitude towards receiving home care

Receiving home care assistance does not appear to be a problem for most of the elderly men I have interviewed. After all, the central focus of men's identity did not rest on upkeep of the home but on activities performed outside of it and benefits brought into it from outside. Accustomed to relying on their wives to carry out the principle part of their household duties, elderly widowers do not find it difficult to transfer their dependence on a wife to dependence on a home help. Nor, when elderly men have wives, do they find it unacceptable for a home care assistant to be coming in.

Jack, a widower in his eighties, was surrounded by administering family and friendly neighbours who assisted him with household chores, but he was very glad also to have a home help coming in. He told me that he wished she would spend longer with him

than she actually did, and he would have liked her to increase the services she did for him, such as shopping.

After Glanmor's wife died he looked desperately for a way to reconstruct the kind of life he had lived with her. He told me:

> "I got into a state of despondency - my house started to go dirty and I didn't want to eat, I didn't want to cook."

He hit upon the solution of taking in a live-in housekeeper, a woman with a small son, whom he had met at the Church.

John and his wife had a home help. Of the married couple, John said he did more housework - it had always been this way. Nevertheless he told me he was happy with the home help, it was his wife who was critical of her. Mary appeared to prefer the act of directing John in the tasks that needed to be done. During the time I spent there she frequently checked to see that John had carried out all the chores required of him. At 11 am she began: "Have you put on the chops? Have you?"; then "Go and check." She repeated this at 11.30. Shortly afterwards she asked me to leave because she felt John was too busy to have his time taken up by my questions. Possibly, at least through directing John in the household activities, Mary may have felt that she continued to exercise some control over her own household. But with the arrival of a home help, the question of Mary's control was directly threatened.

Gordon never helped with the housework during the time that his wife was alive, he restricted his practical efforts around the house to decorating. Now that he was receiving

home care assistance he said he was very pleased. He did not feel that she was interfering - "oh no, she's very nice."

Howard was unhappy at his inability to tackle tasks of self-care or practical necessity about the house. Because of his inability to do any such task unaided he said that he couldn't possibly consider himself to be independent: "I don't like it a bit." On the other hand he welcomed home care assistance, because the home helps were basically taking over functions that had been performed by his wife when she was still alive and in reasonably good health. So Howard did not connect the fact of the girls coming in with the reduction of his independence. "No, I don't. They're very necessary," he said.

While work in the home is, without mental anguish, yielded up to another, men do not give up responsibility for practical chores that traditionally have fallen to them, without a struggle. Stan provides an illustration of this. His legs were badly disfigured as a result of a mining accident and later osteoarthritis had set in, meaning that he walked only with extreme difficulty, and the aid of two walking sticks. Yet he told me:

> "We've got a garden at the back which I'm trying to dig into a lawn, put flowers in..."

Nevertheless, Stan acknowledged that he needed help with repairs from his sons and grandsons, where necessary. He explained:

> "With big electrical jobs, I ask the boys. The wife's washing machine is not working as it should. My son said: "Next time I come up, I'll bring the tools and I'll do it." If I was a younger man I'd be able to do it. But you see you haven't got the patience to do these things, owing to your age. You get fed up,"

"fed up" indeed being a euphemism for many feelings provoked by the experience of old age - including frustration, anger, despair.

4.10 Dependence, independence and self-images of elderly people

4.10.1 The positive evaluation of self-image

As we have seen, a positive self-image very often springs from perceptions of oneself overall as personally independent, and/or of oneself as socially "dependent" namely enjoying the company others. Thus, in old age if one can describe oneself as capable of dealing with basic aspects of self -care and practical upkeep of the domestic environment and/or good at mixing with people, then one's self-image is likely to be good.

However, it appears to be more significant, when evaluating oneself as independent or dependent overall, to be able to describe oneself as physically and practically independent. This too is more likely to result in an individual forming a positive evaluation of themselves.

Old people need to feel in control of the environment in which they live and this means being able to negotiate it by themselves to some extent. Coleman (1990: 118) has written:

> "One important form of self-perception is the perception of being in control of events. Loss of perceived control is damaging, both to morale and eventually to physical health."

Moreover, control over oneself and one's bodily functions is deeply important to self-esteem in old age. As Featherstone and Hepworth have written,

> As a result of the civilising process - the increasing role of manners and etiquette in the regulation of social relations; and in particularly the pronounced development of the "disgust function" - it is not surprising that loss of control over bodily functions is seen as a shameful and embarrassing loss of control over the body and thus the self." (1986:87)

Thus Glanmor was financially independent and socially/emotionally non-independent as he enjoyed mixing with others. However, he described himself as physically dependent and so his overall judgement of himself was that he was "not independent". His self-image suffered as a result of this evaluation.

Similarly, Phyllis was financially independent but physically dependent. She judged herself to have lost her independence, and her morale was lowered as a result of this.

4.10.2 The "will" to be independent

As we have seen, the ability to form a judgement of oneself as personally/practically independent does not stem exclusively from clearly existing capabilities. It is very significant that one should possess the "will" to be independent. However the self-images of those elderly persons with merely a will to be independent were not as positive as those belonging to old people who possessed the actual manifested capabilities. Many of the former, when asked whether they would describe themselves as old, middle-aged or young, chose to call themselves old. In this case, it seems likely that the distance between their will to be physically capable and the reality of the situation is sufficient in some to engender a sense of dissatisfaction. It is particularly difficult for those who have prided themselves on their self-reliance and resourcefulness all their life to have to accept that, suddenly in many cases, they need the assistance of another individual in order to achieve their aims (walking aids, zimmer frames, are all acceptable: what is much more difficult to accept is help from another individual. In such a circumstance the

locus of power and control passes out of one's hands and into that of another - not a comfortable situation for an old person to sustain.)

Arthur provides an excellent example of this in that his overall perception of himself, together with his self-perceived "independence" distinctly changed over the period of time in which I interviewed him. The first time I met him he was recovering from a stroke and leaving a period of depression behind him. He was starting to go to a pub on Fridays where he was meeting new friends. His wife, in nursing home care owing to the onset of Alzheimer's disease, was being discharged periodically at weekends so that Arthur could have her back home for this short period.His Home Care Assistant told me that during the weekends they were at home together, they were like "two lovebirds" sitting on the sofa and holding hands.He was feeling very positive and told me:

> "I'm very independent... if I can do anything for myself, I'll do it. I do what I can."

He couldn't imagine a future time when he would not be independent. However, the second time I met him was several months later and the situation had changed somewhat in Arthur's life. He was experiencing a deterioration in mobility which had put an end to his Friday night outings - he had fallen a few times in front of his friends. His wife's condition was deteriorating to the extent that she was unable to come home at weekends and barely recognised him anymore. Arthur could do less about the house and less in the way of personal tasks, and his continual falls were frustrating him. This time he told me that he didn't consider himself to be independent.

> "No. Independence means you can do what you want to. I can't walk alone...."

His health, in other words, had begun to present a real obstacle to his ability to conduct his life in a way that was satisfactory to him and to which he had recently grown accustomed. "I'm annoyed because I can't walk around," he complained[20]. In answer to the question, "Would you call yourself old, middle-aged, young or what?" he replied: "Old, I'm old. " He added that life in old age meant

> "you can't go out, you can't go swimming, you can't have your wife with you."

Bill's experience was a similar one. For him, though the spirit was very willing, the body was frail and no longer served to walk him the distance to the Lamb and Flag and back for a drink or to manage heavy tasks about the home. He explained, ruefully,

> "I get as far as the Lamb and Flag and then I know ruddy well I've got a helluva job - a helluva job - to get home."

His desire to be independent was very strong and his frustration at the way his body let him down equally powerful. Consequently, when asked in what age category he would place himself he replied: "Useless and hopeless... old."

Jack considers himself to be independent because he battles against his disabilities and refuses to give up even though managing with personal and domestic care is very hard for him - "If you've got a limb off, nothing is easy." His attitude emerges very clearly when he explains his feelings towards his friend, Sid, who does not have this determination:

> "" I said, "Sid, I got a lot of sympathy for you. But if you wore that (false limb) you - wouldn't be able to do more than what you would in a chair, but you'd be more confident," I said. Now, for instance, when I come to the front door and I'm in a chair, I say to my grand-daughter, "Stop." "It's alright, dad,"she said. "No - you wouldn't manage at all," I said. So I get out and walk over the step.... That's why I fight. Now he wouldn't, he wouldn't do that. He doesn't fight...."

Women, no less than men, aim to be physically independent and there is no way in which men suffer more than women on account of the loss or reduction of this independence. This is something that should be stressed, because it is often assumed that women can cope with dependency better than men in that they have been socialised to be dependent on others to an extent. The point that must be made is that women and men both have areas of life in which they find it acceptable to be dependent and areas in which they find it unacceptable. It is not acceptable for either men or women to be physically dependent. For men, it is not acceptable to be unable to perform practical tasks in the house or garden and women find it unacceptable for themselves to be unable to manage their own households.

Mary, for example, confined to a wheelchair called herself "very independent", presumably referring to her "inner nature" or the way she felt inside, but at the same time experienced the frustration of not being able to manage her household. Her husband, himself weakened by pneumoconiosis, had taken over the housework entirely following her stroke. She described herself as "old". She added: "I had a good life until this took me eight years ago."

For Mary, "old age" came when she stopped being able to go on the short walks that had given her so much pleasure, and ceased to retain a modicum of self-sufficiency about the house. The short walks had been a means of keeping in touch with her neighbours; now, however, "it's as much as I can do to go to the front door." Her failure in self-sufficiency about the house is brought home to her by little things, such as times when, standing on

the doorstep, she's unable to see anyone around who might be able to fetch her bread.

"And you do think: oh, I wish I could do that myself."

4.10.3 Physical independence and age self-classification

In contrast, those physically independent people possessed of reasonably good health who were in the "old-old" age category were disposed to describe themselves as middle-aged or young in answer to my standard question.

Olive, for example, had done all her housework till her brief but fairly serious illness at the age of 85 and still did much of it, with the help of a home care assistant. She described herself as financially independent but socially a mixer. It was her physical independence, however, that mostly determined that she describe herself as independent. She was unsure, at 87, whether she could describe herself as "young" even though she felt that way in her self. She explained:

> "I don't feel old inside, but the body is old.. I suppose 87 is a good age, isn't it? But my housekeeper tells me I'm marvellous...."

Again, Constance perceived herself as "independent" and was able to manage her own household. She told me: "I've never felt old" and believed that she was really middle-aged.

4.10.4 Self-perceptions as dependent

There was another category of elderly individuals who evaluated themselves positively and who generally tended to see themselves as "younger" than their chronological age

would suggest. These were the individuals who accepted their physical limitations and the loss of their physical independence and accepted the necessity of receiving help without much inner turmoil, partly at least, because they were able to place this present need for help in the context of their whole lives.

Minnie did not mind receiving help with her housework. She said she was doing her own housework till she fell four years ago but doesn't mind being helped now. Minnie's physical disabilities had not, as yet, got in the way of the kind of life she enjoyed and the activities she valued and she took a practical attitude towards receiving help in this one area of her life. At the same time, Minnie said she felt young at heart. She said:

> "People ask me - when they see my age they think I'm making myself older than I am."

It must not be considered that a state of independence is universally aspired to or that, when it is attained, it is wholly appreciated. Some individuals enjoyed the experience of receiving help and were very ready to acknowledge themselves as dependent and, indeed, to gain a certain pleasure from that fact.

Jack positively enjoyed receiving help, seeing it as a particular kind of relationship that was very gratifying to him. In his younger days he said he helped very little about the house - his wife, whom he described as a "lovely little girl" did everything for him. He claimed never to have washed a dish in his life. He explained that he enjoyed being 78 very much and one of the reasons for this was because people were much more willing now to offer help. He said:

> "I get a lot of help... everybody's been very kind... you can be <u>too</u> independent ...what's the use of being up there when they're down here?"

He continued:

> "I like to mix up... no, I'm not independent.. its nice to ask somebody to have a bit of help, see."

Indeed, he discussed his relationship with his wife almost entirely in terms of the way she had "helped" him all her life. "I had a lovely wife, she looked after me. She looks after me still...." He said that in old age nothing had changed in their relationship - "when I ask her to do anything for me, she'll do it.." He enjoys being the age he is: "I got a wife to look after me, see." Jack takes his ideas about being helped into the afterlife, furthermore.

> "There's no unhappiness there. And if you want anything, there's more help there."

At the same time, Jack did not see himself as old: "I prefer to be with the young ones."

Other individuals had both aspired to and attained a condition of independence in their daily lives but had come to see this condition as offering, at best, mixed blessings. Lorraine felt this way. She felt that if she had asked her children for more help then she may have been able to develop a closer relationship with them. The absence of this closeness in her life was something she mourned deeply. She said:

> "That's where I've lost it with my children, I suppose. If they don't come to offer I wouldn't ask them."

On the other hand, not everyone who acquiesced in the need for help did so in high spirits. Ella, for example, seemed to do so with an air of defeatism. She said:

> "I do a little, but I let them got on with it. I'm not worried. I think when you lose your husband, nothing matters. .. all I'm doing is waiting to die."

Those elderly people who were able to accept the reality of needing help and being dependent more calmly were often characterised by being old-old rather than young-old,

and suffering from chronic physical disabilities. It is as if they had sufficient time to adapt themselves to this position, and to lower their expectations about themselves and about what they could achieve single handedly.

Gordon illustrates this position. Aged 76 and almost totally blind he was currently residing in a sheltered flat in Sandfields Estate, Port Talbot. He admitted, with composure, that he was not at all independent.

> "There's lots of things I can't do. Because of my eyes. The retinas at the back have gone...I accept it."

He concentrated on the fact that he did receive help - and for that he was very glad. He explained:

> "I'm very lucky. I've got a woman coming in every day to do my breakfast. On certain days then she'll clean the flat.On other days, she'll do the washing."

Gordon was able to accept that other people of his age were more capable than he was. He told me, referring to the other residents at the sheltered flats complex with equanimity:

> "There's people down there. They're 85 and they're walking around smart. Then there's people like myself. I can't do anything."

Physically dependent people largely are those who cannot see to their self-care or perform simple practical tasks.Also, as we have already noted, people call themselves dependent if they consider themselves to be sociable. Those who called themselves dependent because they saw themselves as sociable possessed a thriving and positive self-image.

Will, describing himself, said:

> "I think they would say he's a jolly, happy man. He's got a nice face, he always talks to people. I think that's what people think about me."

Daro, who similarly saw himself as "definitely not "independent described himself with the words: "Nobody's ever said nothing bad about me." When I asked him: "How happy do you feel with your current way of life?" he replied:

> "I've got no worries, nothing to worry about - so long as I can get around, have a cigarette."

Hannah didn't consider herself to be independent because she enjoyed mixing with people. She described herself thus: "I'm a happy person - I'm interested in people."

However, in cases where the sociable individual was at the same time physically dependent, their self-image was not likely to be so positive.For example, Agnes enjoyed mixing with people and was quite certain that she was not "independent" in the unsociable sense of the word. However, her physical limitations severely distressed her. She explained:

> "My daughter comes every Saturday to take me out, and I feel awful because she has to do everything. I feel giddy so she has to take my hand... I feel awful, but she doesn't."

As we have seen, self-perceptions as dependent can also result from a change in circumstance or a sudden decline in physical abilities which affects one's daily life. With Howard, the death of his wife was accompanied by a rapid decline in his own health, culminating in a double amputation, and the view of himself as dependent.

For Phyllis too, the death of both her mother and her brother, with both of whom she had lived, together with the onset of her own ill health, combined to produce in her a perception of herself as "dependent."

> "It did mean that I got my health, I can do it for myself, I can do what I want to do, but now I've got to depend on other people to do it"

she explained.

Phyllis believed herself to have got old at the age of 80:

> "Up to 80 I looked after my brother with Alzheimer's and I was so active and so capable but it's gone all the other way now."

She added, "And it do hurt me."

Interestingly enough, 80 seems to be the age several of the older old people chose to fix as the onset of their old age[21]. Mary was another. She explained,

> "I was alright until I was 80. I used to do everything for myself until I was 80. But once I was 80...."

She shrugged, as if to convey her sense of helplessness.

Mr J- also provided a vivid illustration of this. A retired minister of 75 who was being cared for full-time by his wife, he was not at all happy at the demands his illness and invalidity were putting on his wife. He said:

> "I feel terrible that she has to do so much... I used to be able to do anything - decorating, gardening... I fixed these lights.. now I'm useless, I can't do nothing."

He also saw himself as being very old.

Phyllis' physical independence was similarly mirrored in a poor self-image and lowered morale. Her lack of ability to get out and about resulted in her losing interest in her personal appearance and even in her will to live. She spoke as follows:

> "I used to take interest in my dress and all that, I used to take interest in myself, in makeup and all that, and I was great up until the last year looking after Tom.. I don't want it now.. I haven't been out since I've been ill, I can't be bothered now...I couldn't stick going to the hairdressers and being in a crowd."

She was not at all happy at having to describe herself as "dependent", by which she meant practically speaking.

4.10.5 Methods of avoiding self-perceptions as "dependent"

One way elderly people chose to avoid the necessity of having to call themselves dependent was by formalizing helping relationships, even those involving family members[22].

Violet adopted this approach. Violet was able to see herself as independent. She explained that she did not want her children to be too involved with her life - "I like them to live their own lives." While her daughter assisted Violet with her housework, Violet said: "She's got to. She's on Attendance."

Mrs T- saw the home care she received in this way too, not as part of a helping relationship but something she had earned the right to. She said:

> "I'm 82 years of age and I'm paying for it. I pay my rates and this poll tax, everything. So why can't I get this little bit? Because when the winter comes, I can't do it. I'm 82 you see, it gets a lot."

By paying her taxes, Mrs T- seemed to consider that she was a full participant in civil society; consequently her desire to receive help from official sources - no more than she was due - was fully consistent with her idea of herself as an independent actor acting out of self-determination. In other words, it did not diminish her self-perception of autonomy in the least.

4.10.6 Worries and anxieties of those who perceive themselves as dependent

For those elderly people in South Wales who believed themselves to be dependent, the most general fear was that of being a burden, either on one's spouse or, more commonly, on one's children.

Gordon demonstrated this concern. His son visited him twice weekly, but didn't help out with anything practical. Nor did Gordon ever go to stay at his son's house over the weekends - only at Christmas. However, Gordon was content with this situation and had no wish to see it changed:

> "No, see, I've had my life and he can have his you know.. they're happy. They're both working. They seem to have plenty of money... let them enjoy themselves. I don't want to interfere."

Similarly Ivy, who was otherwise independent, did fall prey to loneliness. She did not want her children to feel obliged to visit her owing to this fact. She said:

> "I don't want them to think that they've got to come and see me, because I'm getting old. I don't want them to come unless they <u>want</u> to come."

Indeed, as has been discussed previously, the fear of becoming a burden is something which seems to affect all elderly people of this generation. Even if they do not perceive themselves, as yet, as physically dependent on anyone, the possibility of becoming that way always remains.

Menna, for example,said that she was happy with her life.

> "I'd like to carry on till I'm 90. If I was a burden, I wouldn't want to live. But as I am now, I'm not a burden to anybody."

Certain elderly individuals showed themselves willing to substitute a particular goal for a lesser goal in order to preserve themselves from the necessity of having to ask for help and depend on others. This has been noted in other studies of elderly people and indicates the great value, almost reaching sacred and ritual proportions, placed in the quality of "independence".

Ivy expressed this position neatly. She said:

> "I don't ask anybody to do anything for me. If I can't do it myself, I go without, sort of thing... it's just habit."

In addition, there can be a sense of anxiety produced in the very act of being dependent on someone; for it is, indeed, an acknowledgement, both to oneself and to others, of a great vulnerability.[23] Lil said:

> "Take tonight, now. I have a taxi to take me down to my club. Now if I'm not home before 5 o'clock tonight, I'll be on edge, because that's the time he's coming."

However, it must be noted that there is a real sense in which, although elderly people declare their aim to be that of independence, in reality they truly appear to practise interdependence wherever possible. Phyllis, for example, received help in practical matters from her sister, but returned the favour with generous financial help and, in any case, there had always been a sense in which both sisters were mutually dependent on each other's emotional and psychological support. Constance similarly called herself independent: but in truth her relationships were balanced out by patterns of mutual dependencies - her daughter lived in her house but returned this favour by carrying out practical tasks around the home.

The point to remind ourselves of also is that autonomy and dependency are not rigidly exclusive terms but very often are to be found residing in the same personality. As we have seen throughout this chapter, quite often there is a psychological need for other people, combined with a fierce commitment to physical independence and "doing" for oneself. This fits quite easily into one personality.

Bill presents an example of this. He was very lonely and described how he would "talk" to his dead wife for hours. At the same time he was most committed to the idea that he did not want to be a "nuisance" to anyone in the matter of physical care. He took pride in "doing everything for meself, making sure I don't pester anybody." Edith also experienced the same dual needs. She said:

> "If (independence) means you're able to do just what you like... I don't like being on my own really, but I do like my independence."

4.11 CONCLUSION

Defining the terms

We have seen in this chapter that "independence" can mean many things at different times to old people. It can mean the ability to wash and dress oneself, to walk unaided and cope with practical tasks around the home without having to rely on another's help. It can also be used to mean inability to mix with others and poor sociability. In the former case it is highly valued. In the latter case it is not, neither by men nor by women. Financial self-sufficiency is yet another aspect of the term, prized by elderly people who value the fact that they do not need to accept "charity" from anyone. It is certainly even possible to be "too" independent if that results in cutting you off from others. Violet said:

> "Oh, I think all us old people are very independent - we're too independent, I think.. Me, if I get my daughter to buy me something, I want to pay for it, see. I think old people are very independent."

Dependencies and independence in daily life

In the extreme form, neither dependency nor independence are comfortable conditions to live with. It is certainly even possible to be "too" independent if that results in cutting you off from others. Some elderly people are "forced" to be independent on account of having noone to whom they can turn for help or for companionship. Others are living in close intergenerational situations, with a bedroom of their own and a single bed in the family home and mourn the loss of their "independence" which here involves the freedom to plan one's day as one chooses and not to have to answer to another "head" of the house. Quite often "interdependency" seems to be the preferred state, expressed through reciprocal exchanges in which the old person can take part in both

help-giving and help-receiving acts. Women especially enjoy giving help and can find it less rewarding to receive help from others(which, in Blau's terms, would suggest that they are not principally motivated by the idea of exercising greatest power in their relationships). Most elderly people fear greatly the possibility of becoming a burden on their families, expressing their perception that today the socially acceptable occurrence is for help to pass in a downward direction between generations. Essentially, perhaps, independence tempered by reciprocity, is the most comfortable situation in which an elderly person can find themselves as among other things, it signifies their continuing control, both over themselves and over their environment.

Indeed, it is the family on whom the elderly person is most likely to depend, whether he/she lives alone or in the family home. Daughters and daughters-in-law are more involved in help-giving than are sons, which indicates, again, the kin-keeping function of the women in this locality's informal matriarchy. Old-old people are more comfortable and acquiescent in the dependent relationship than are young-old people, especially if the former have a chronic illness or disability, but reciprocity is generally aspired to by most individuals in one form or another. Reciprocity may be described as a means of maintaining one's autonomy while at the same time acknowledging the need for help or assistance in certain areas of life. It is a means of preserving a sense of control over one's environment and one's relationships without succumbing to an immense vulnerability or state of powerlessness, characteristic of the state of childhood. Unfortunately, today's society tends to view reciprocity mostly as a short-term exchange, in keeping with the urgent, impatient tempo of the late Twentieth Century mentality, rather than in the context of a whole life, so parents who have helped their children tend

to consider it as "not right" somehow to receive help from their children at this point in their lives - or at least to be aware that others younger than themselves would consider it so. An awareness of a life-time perspective on help-giving patterns is most strong in sibling relationships where, at the end of the lifespan, younger siblings are very much taken up in the process of caring for older brothers and sisters, who once themselves acted as child-minders and later,guides and mentors for them. The shorter-span reciprocal relationship is more likely to be found among spouses and in a different way, between grandparent and grandchild; for example if the grandparent receives practical help and wishes to return this in some other way they may do this, perhaps by giving gifts and thereby preserving an equitable balance.

It is possible to depend on friends and neighbours too, especially in sheltered housing where young-old people assist old-old individuals without much hint of reciprocity or with only a token return in the shape of small gifts, pots of beetroot or packets of soap. Men seem to be less involved in these friendship patterns than are women, except during short periods of crisis such as illness.

Indeed, women and men do have a different experience of independence and dependence throughout their lives although it would be incorrect to assume that independence is less important to women than it is to men. For women (and many were accustomed to sacrifice and a more restrained self-determination) it has often been more comfortable to give help in life than it has been to receive it. In the latter part of their lives some women have independence forced upon them for the first time as a result of the death of their husbands, when they may have to learn to make their own decisions

and to act among others with autonomy. An important aspect of independence in the lives of all women is the continued ability to manage their own homes, so the experience of receiving home care assistance can be a difficult and distressing one, contributing to a lowered self-appraisal.

Men, on the other hand, have expressed their independence daily in the tough working conditions many of them had to endure in this part of Wales. The disintegration of their physical stamina is a very difficult experience for them, although they do not mind receiving home care in the way that their wives do as this was never an aspect of life to which they were fully committed or in which their self-esteems were bound up.

Indeed, self-image in old age is closely connected to perceptions one holds of oneself as independent or dependent. Practical/physical independence encourages an elderly individual to maintain a positive self-image although certain individuals find it easier to acquiesce in dependency relationships, notably the old-old who are chronically physically disabled. Dependency in social terms does not encourage a negative self-image. Continuing to see themselves as independent allows one to feel that their basic identity is unchanged - that they are not "old" with its connotations of helplessness but that they are <u>themselves</u> (see Thompson, 1992). To see oneself as "dependent" on others is similarly a recognition that one is continuing to be a proactive member of society, involved with friends and family.

In most individuals into whose lives I have been given an insight, however, dependency needs are found alongside capabilities for independence to a higher or lesser degree. It

is very rare indeed to encounter individuals who are either totally dependent or wholly independent. Physically helpless elderly people can provide companionship to their carers; deeply lonely, socially isolated individuals can and frequently do maintain letter-writing contact with others; those who can only receive from one individual often find themselves in a wholly giving relationship with another, even if the other is not a person at all, but a pet dog. It appears that only the most distressed individuals, who in many cases had experienced a recent bereavement or disruption to their former way of life, lacked this system of reciprocal checks and balances in their lives.

NOTES

1. Self-esteem may be defined as "self-evaluation" in the sense of "measuring up to" and self worth is concerned with the perceptions of absolute value: "People have self worth if they value themselves and see their life as meaningful." (Freden,1982 quoted in Coleman, 1990b:119.)

2. As D.M.Gibson (1985:46) points out, "Like happiness, it seems, dependency means different things to different people - or at least different things in different situations. The absence of a consistent definition is a direct result of the particular aspect of dependency which is relevant in different contexts..."

3. The questions I asked were phrased as follows: a)"Would you consider yourself to be independent?" b)"What does independence mean to you?"

4. Qureshi (1986:168) has drawn attention to the distinction which has sometimes been made between emotional and social needs - for company, affection etc - and the need for practical tending. While, she says, "the independent attainment of social rewards is impossible" and a state of interdependence at least is necessary, "independence has been shown to be tremendously important to many elderly people" especially regarding tending. This distinction is indeed the one that has been made by elderly people in this study.

5. Self-care includes some/all of the following aspects: putting on shoes and socks/stockings; washing hair: washing hands and face; washing all over or taking a bath; dressing. Practical capability includes mobility: getting in or out of a chair; walking about inside/outside, travelling by bus: also House care - ability to do light housework like dusting/washing up: making the bed: ironing; washing

clothes, preparing and cooking meals; doing heavy shopping, of which capabilities elderly people may possess some/any and still be practically independent. This as used in the Clackmannan scale of dependency quoted in Wilkin and Thompson (1989)

6. Belgrave (1990:495) writes: "When chronic illness is accepted as simply a problem or inconvenience with which one must deal in order to get on with more important matters. self-concept is virtually unaffected. The sufferer does not see herself as ill and the body is relegated to the background of everyday life. The body is much more relevant to self-concept for those who see themselves as ill. It is a major factor in self-concept for those who are overwhelmed by illness. Here the body is unmanageable and concern with physical problems dominates everyday life".

7. Not only its moral authority but its practical viability: as Rosser and Harris (1965)have pointed out the old of today in contrast to their parents are less likely to be surrounded by children, more likely to be single and more likely to have all their children married.

8. This partly reflects the ambiguous attitude of this society towards ageing, where it recognises both the Middle Eastern attitude of old age as the summit of life and the Greek view of old age as a great misfortune; see Slater (1963.

9. Much previous research has confirmed this; eg Sweetser(1963) draws attention to the fact that there are closer ties between married daughters with parents compared to those of married sons with parents (ie though our kinship system is bilateral there is asymmetry): Horowitz (1985) too points out that sons tend to become care givers only in the absence of an available female sibling; they are more likely to rely on the support of their own spouses in care giving, especially with "hands-on" services. The combined services of sons and daughters-in-law may equal those provided by daughters; Willmott and Young (1960) and Anspach and Rosenberg (1973) found that the wife's family is kept in contact more than the husband's family especially in the working class.

10. Statistics for the Rhondda - admittedly in a worse position in terms of overcrowding and poverty than the anthracite coalfield region - show that three-quarters of Rhondda's inhabitants either shared with another household or were part of a household of 6 or more (Jones, 1991).

11. Here, young-old and old-old refers to abilities, rather than chronological age, and is used metaphorically: old-old implies physical frailty which brings on conditions associated with "old age"; young-old is where the individual continues to live a physically active, mobile life, whether in her 70s or 90s.

12. This is quite typical of the grandfather-grandchild relationship.See, eg, Troll (1980).

13. However, it is not only from love that children feel it necessary to care for their parents: the sense of obligation persists even for those offspring who felt that their parents had not been "good" parents - see Qureshi (1986).

14. Research has shown that daughters-in-law in a family of sons(s) assume the duties that would normally fall to the daughters of the family. See Horowitz (1985)

15. Indeed, demands on elderly people can be particularly trying at this stage in their lives. Cohler (1983)observes that because personality changes leading to increasing interiority take place in this stage of life, so continued responsibility gives rise to lower morale, especially among old women. The dependency needs of others can become a source of stress, especially in working class families where role strain and overload may be as significant a problem as role loss.

16. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) observed that grandparents were often viewed as indulgent friends and confidants, as "friendly equals", Radcliffe-Brown suggesting that this functioned as a relief from the tensions. Later studies have seen this too, eg Boyd (1969).

17. Sarah Matthews (1979) has pointed out that maintaining a belief in reciprocity is one way to escape an image of herself as a valueless old person.

18. This function also makes women the principle individuals linking the family together, over short or long distances:see Berardo (1967).

19. Widows in this part of the world, and young widows in particular, have no defined place in the social structure into which they can take a part after bereavement, as in countries such as India and Africa. They have to create their own social world (Lopata,1972).

20. Joep Munnichs(1976), points out that dependency is generally only perceptible to a particular elderly individual when changes in his existence which concern himself present themselves or are introduced: relocation, illness, dying of a partner, etc.

21. This is the observation made by Wenger (1987) regarding the cut-off point for the start of seriously declining health in old age.

22. Lee (1985) points out that elderly people's sense of independence is threatened less by dependence on government services than by dependence on children. Indeed, younger people are much more willing to provide services to older family members than are older people to accept them - and he suggests exchange theory as a possible explanation here.

23. It would seem that independence, perceived in the sense of a degree of physical capability and practical self- reliance, is of greater value in general, than are certain goals in particular. Thus, as in the Sheffield study quoted by Qureshi (1986) a number of elderly people who couldn't wash themselves all over declined

help, preferring, for example, to strip wash - that is, they chose to abandon the goal rather than to engage in a search for help.

CHAPTER FIVE

MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY IN OLD AGE

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Gender through the lifespan

This chapter looks at the behaviour of men and women in old age in certain key situations or family roles wherein their masculinity or femininity can be seen to be involved - roles such as housewife, grandfather, sister, brother; situations such as retirement, failing health, widow(er)hood. This chapter specifically looks at the differences and similarities between old men and old women in terms of their behaviour towards other people in various of these roles/situations. This is looking at gender differences in old age, bearing in mind the distinction between sex and gender:

> "Sex refers to biological males and females distinguished by reproductive organs. Gender refers to feminine and masculine attributes and social roles"(Mann,1983:143).

Or, again,

> "Gender refers to differences between females and males that are socially defined and socially constructed. Therefore, gender varies across societies and over time, as societies change. Sex refers to differences that are physiologically based..."(Gee and Kimball,1987:14/15).

Traditionally, "masculine" qualities are instrumental, rather than expressive, aggressive, assertive and rational and stereotypically "feminine" qualities are the opposite - expressive, passive, submissive, intuitional. But does this distinction hold true for men and women in old age?

It could be argued that in this locality, and indeed perhaps the UK as a whole, the differencesbetween "masculine" and "feminine" behaviour have been socially stressed and exaggerated for the working-class generation now in their seventies or older, where the functioning of the social and economic system depended on a strict division of roles in and out of the workplace. Men and women who are now old had very little contact with one another over the lifecycle except within the familial or marital relationship. They were separated from each other in school and in work, (and women upon marriage were usually obliged to relinquish their employment[1]), as well as in leisure activities, excepting organised dances designed to bring them together in order that the social system be perpetuated. In South Wales, men were the breadwinners and their principle role was that of worker and wage-earner, the principle roles for women being those of wife, mother and homemaker[2]. Spinsters and widows fell outside the system somewhat and were pitied by other women, considered unlucky or failures,especially in the former case, for where they might well have had a career of their own, they did not have a man.

A woman I got to know who never married but chose instead to have a career explained her choice in very positive terms, highlighting the great obligation she had felt towards her parents, following their sacrifice in helping her with further education. She said she felt that she couldn't throw it all back in their faces and give it up by marrying. She explained:

> "I came from a working family - my father was a railwayman in the tinworks and he had to rear three or four of us in further education. And my sister and I didn't get married.. there was no grant aid in those days and we didn't like our parents working so hard and then us throwing it back in their faces."

However, another spinster, as the eldest child of a very large family, found her choice of marriage and motherhood curtailed by her greater responsibility to her natal family. "I do think my life was spoilt looking after children," she said.

An elderly widow, commenting on the life of the spinster, spoke as follows:

> "I think they're asking for cancer. If you look at the women who are very tidy - some schoolteachers and people who keep themselves very tight - they are the ones who get cancer. I've watched it... if they had children their glands would be working properly. As it is their hormones are.. well it's not natural really."

The definite assumption, held by most people of this generation, was that sexual relations were only permitted within marriage. Therefore, those who did not marry did not experience sex and were ignorant of their own sexuality.

Ella, who had very strong ideas about spinsterhood, continued:

> "I would think they must be very lonely and they must always be wondering what sex is like."

Daniel John did not approve of men remaining bachelors. He said:

> "Its not nature, the way I look at it... Those who have never got married and have never had sex don't know what life is. Honestly. A man who hasn't had a woman doesn't know what life is...there's something wrong with them."

For the men who didn't marry, it was necessary for them to form "working partnerships" with another woman - a sister, mother or housekeeper - who would provide him with the domestic assistance he needed in order to fulfil his work role. Only one man in my study had remained a bachelor and his life had revolved around his social involvements

centred on the pub. His status as a bachelor seemed to be higher among the other men than the spinsters' were among the women they knew, the implication being that he had managed to "avoid" marriage while she had been "deprived" of it.

For the majority of people, who did get married, the marital relationship appears to have been successfully and satisfyingly worked out in this locality. Unlike in other mining communities documented (for example, Dennis, Henriques, Slaughter, 1956) it was not the case that men and women went their separate ways and only met up in bed. Indeed, there was a fund of deep mutual affection between man and wife in the average marriage, which manifested itself in cooperation and teamwork in the home and several evenings a week spent in each other's company. However, although the marital relationship was characterized largely by cooperation and affection, parenthood was a role that often fitted men awkwardly and, at the very least, for which they lacked adequate resources of time. As we have seen in Chapter III, in terms of social relationships outside of the home there were also striking differences in the concept of friendship as it applied to men and women, with different patterns which have been described as camaraderie versus intimacy[3].

5.1.2 Gender in old age

It would appear that the difference in behaviour between men and women in old age lessens in comparison with earlier points in the lifecycle, in line with the occurrence that their activities become less differentiated at this time. Olive, a key informant, felt

strongly that she had changed her behaviour, as the result of her widowhood, moving in a direction that could be judged to be more "masculine". She told me:

> "I've got a little bit harder. I've had to learn to decide things for myself, haven't I, for twenty-five years. Noone to consult really, you know."

Certain kinds of behaviour and functions are no longer the prerogative of either sex. Women are as comfortable with going out to socialise and mixing in society as are men with staying at home, in a sort of reversal of roles.

Folk wisdom would have it that old men and old women even begin to resemble each other at this point in the lifecycle: whatever the truth of the latter, it is a fact that the modification of gender differences in old age has been observed cross-culturally. The stereotypical - in so much as it is universal - pattern in old age seems to be the transformation of the powerless, relatively passive younger woman into the "virile" older woman, and the parallel transformation of the aggressive, assertive, confrontational younger man into the passive, peacekeeping older man.

One can discern a change in power relations here: the woman gaining personal power as she enters the final lifestage, the man losing power as he leaves the empowering roles of worker and physically strong male in his prime behind. To a certain extent, it may be said that old women become more fully integrated into society at this lifestage, at the same time as men lose this empowering involvement. Myerhoff and Simic have looked at several cultures and found the same phenomenon. They write:

> "..power peaks at different times for men and women, and where power declines for one sex, leaving a vacuum, the other frequently steps in to fill it" (1978:240).

The psychologist David Gutmann (1987) carried out a study into gender in old age cross-culturally, and sees several persistent themes. There is the older woman who becomes a ritual leader in her old age; the Indian mother-in-law who reaches the apex of her power and influence; the ageing warrior who chooses to cook for his family, even though such activity earns him the title "old woman" (Simmons,1945).

In studies of traditional cultures, the woman's menopause is often seen as the watershed event for ritual and magical reasons[4].In South Wales, as in western Europe generally the menopause is not publicly acknowledged and has something of the status of a taboo. However, there is no doubt that many elderly women - widows especially - increase their involvement in the outside world in comparison with their male contemporaries. In an interesting parallel with the ritual leadership assumed by post-menopausal women in other cultures, South Wales women often come to dominate the church and church-based activities. Joining clubs and associations they increase their social contacts while men's social circles often wither away altogether. More than one confident, outgoing, elderly woman told me about how much she enjoyed going out, while similar numbers of men described themselves as "homebirds" and informed me, not without expressing their own sense of surprise, of how much they enjoyed staying at home. Thus, there is a definite withdrawal of men from the outside world back to home and hearth, just as women correspondingly move outwards from the hearth to the domain beyond. Sometimes, it appeared as if both sexes had made a unique discovery in old age of the environment that had all but eluded them in earlier years. David Gutmann comments

(1987:94/5), on the change in the elderly man:

> "In some cases, these transformations involve more than a drift away from flamboyant aggression, but an actual shift in gender distinctiveness, from univocal masculinity to sexual bimodality, or even implicit femininity. Becoming more domestic in their interests, they also retire into domestic space, the inner space of women."

Retirement and widowhood have been compared to each other as producing equally significant effects on men and women respectively, in terms of stress, degree of life-change and so on. But while retirement "weakens" a man's position in society by cutting him off from his source of status, power and control, widowhood often strengthens a woman's position, strengthening her autonomy and self-determination, obliging her sometimes for the first time to go out and fend for herself and, conversely, gaining her admittance into areas of life to which till this point she had been a stranger. In old age, men and women withdraw from mainstream society and are no longer called upon to fulfil their former functions - neither those associated with the economy nor with the family. Retirement has been described as signalling the end of productive manhood; widowhood certainly signals the beginning of a new phase in the experience of womanhood, and one which many women turn into a positive event. There is strength and power to be gained, too, from the liberation of all-encompassing roles - especially wife/mother - which enables the old woman to explore her own interests and please herself for the first time. Women build on the managerial and social sides of their personality in old age in a way, indeed, that can make them appear domineering and even frightening to their male contemporaries. The description of the old woman as "witch" in cross-cultural myths and legends highlights the fear she inspires. Gutmann

(1987:174) quotes a Turkish legend which states this point:

> "When a boy is born a hundred evil jinn are born with him, and when a girl is born there are born with her a hundred angels; but every year a jinn passes from the man to the woman, so that when the man is 100 years old he is surrounded by one hundred angels and when the woman is 100 years old she is surrounded by 100 devils."

Men and women also behave differently in their relationships in old age. We have seen in Chapter III the difference between male and female friendships; in this chapter we will look at those relationships conducted with other members of the family. Family relationships are another way through which masculinity and femininity in old age can be expressed and observed - for example, through the behaviour of the grandfather in comparison to the grandmother, the ageing father as compared to the ageing mother.

The following situations provide interesting backdrops against which to explore the behaviour of men and women in later life in terms of gender and the social construction of masculinity and femininity: retirement; the event of declining health; the marital relationship in old age; bereavement (comparing widowhood with widowerhood); parenthood and grandparenthood and sexuality in old age. Finally the chapter will look at definitions of masculinity and femininity in old age, comparing the experiences of other cultures with that of South Wales.

5.2 Retirement

5.2.1 How retirement affects men in terms of roles of provider and worker

Retirement is a major event for men and a minority of women who have worked, as well as for the wives of retiring men. It is one of the last rites of passage in the modern urban life cycle equalling in importance the start of one's first job in the workforce (Crawford, 1973), which took place for many men in this study at the age of 12, but signifiying the end of men's involvement in adult society. For men of this generation, the roles of "worker" and "provider" are intrinsic to their identities and have been so for fifty years of their lives.These roles have also served to define the nature of their masculinity, for the demands and expectations they contain are essential components of the demands and expectations contained in the idea of masculinity itself. To be male is to be physically strong and courageous, possessing stamina, and the ability to make on-the-spot decisions - and as such it is closely bound up with the qualities required to be a worker in the coal, steel or iron industries. The resounding importance of the significance of the work role continues in old age, as I discovered one morning, when I was visiting a daycentre, and an old man in a wheelchair arrived in uniform. He had been an officer in the navy for many years and for the whole of that day he was the talking-point and source of admiration of all the elderly men in the dayroom.

It may be argued that for men of this generation, joining the heavy labour work force at this time would have served as an initiation into manhood. Many societies cross-culturally put their young males through difficult initiation tests in order that they should qualify from boys to men. For example, in East Africa the Masai and Samburu have

circumcision rites. In this society

> "we too have regarded manhood as an artificial state, a challenge to be overcome, a prize to be won by fierce struggle" (Gilmore,1990:17).

In South Wales, joining the workforce of men down the pit or in the metal works may have served the same purpose for this generation.

As we have noted, while starting one's first job signals the beginning of one's productive "manhood", which in most cases among my group of elderly informants involved working in the mining, steel or tinplate industries, retiring from the workforce indicates that it has now come to an end and it is an abrupt cut-off point for many men, scarcely any having been able to prepare for it psychologically. Retirement is also an emasculating act, removing them from the source of their power and authority and the opportunity for self-determination.

Men who had defined themselves in terms of their value as a worker and their capabilities as a provider for their wife and family can easily feel deprived and succumb to the feeling that now they are worthless. Not only that, but the ending of their jobs robs their lives of meaning and purpose, socialised as they have been, since boyhood, to credit the identity of worker very highly, if not most highly of all. Indeed, in its brutal severity, for men of this social class and generation, it would not be too much of a distortion to compare it with an act of castration.

The sentiment of being valueless to oneself as well as to others after retirement was evident among the group I studied, as illustrated by the following selection of opinions.

Bill said:

> "You get up in the morning, you shave, you dress tidy. And that's what you do until you undress and go to bed."

Ella identified this same sentiment in her husband. She told me: "He didn't like being "useless" if you want to put it that way."

Dai experienced feelings of anger and frustration.

> "I was annoyed that I got to the age of retirement. I worked over 65 and then of course they told me that's it..."

As Gordon put it: "I worked all my life.. And there's nothing when you're not working."

Indeed, Gordon had perceived a basic truth because for men, again of this class and age, there was nothing to replace either this role or this identity.

For many men, retirement came early owing to sickness and disability and/or the closing down of the works. Most men I talked to were not on the receiving end of a retirement ceremony. But in cases where they were given some kind of send off by the other men at work, this was much valued and suggested the significance accorded to and benefits produced by a ceremony which marks the end of one's working days and forces one to recognize that this stage of one's life is over.

Arthur, for example, had a leaving ceremony organized by the men at work which "meant a lot" to him in that his successful fulfilment of the role of working male had been recognized publically.

Stan, on the other hand, who was a manager at the pit, had a formal leaving do complete with dinner and speeches. To Stan it was "quite meaningful. You feel that you have achieved something."

Daniel John did not enjoy the benefit of a retirement ceremony but was emphatic in agreeing that he would have liked to have one. But he was able to be philosophical about it. "As it happens it was an easy job for me," he said. "People who had worked hard, they deserved a do...but it was nothing for us." In fact, the event of a retiring ceremony might have been more significant than many of these men realised in easing their transition from the working to the non-working life. Research has shown that retiring men who pass through a retirement ceremony are more likely to accept their new status - as retired person- whereas those who do not enjoy such a ceremony are less likely to acquiesce in this new status (see Crawford, 1973). The latter continue to feel as if their lives are passing through a transitional stage, looking back over their shoulders at the working world, which they cannot quite accept that they have left - they often take on post-retirement employment as if in the continuing need to prove themselves as working males. We can definitely see this tendency manifested among the men of this South Wales area.

When Howard retired as a brewery representative he took on another job, working with a security firm on night duty. This was necessary, he said, because he'd planned all his Insurances to end at 65, but he retired at 60. His eventual retirement, however, came at 70, indicating that there were perhaps deeper, more significant personal meanings in his refusal to terminate the working life.

Olive's husband fell into similar kind of work after retiring from the police force.

Violet's husband tried to get easy, light jobs after his period as a ship's captain came to an end, but he wasn't successful.

Jack, although a very frail amputee at 86, has never renounced his identity as a working man and feels unable to totally discount the possibility that he could work again. "If I was fit I could get a job anywhere, firing." This was consistent with the Jack whom I got to know over three years and who was very much a "lad" in identity and, in later life, transferred the qualities that had been so essential to his profession of firing - strength, stamina, courage - into fighting the disability associated with his diabetes, as will be discussed more fully later.

Ordinarily, skills acquired by professional men in the course of their working lives are easily transferable into other areas of their lives, such as studying, reading, attending speeches and lectures, whereas for the majority of men in this study, who had been manual workers, their skills are rarely relevant outside of the workplace. As Chris Phillipson (1980:19) has stated it:

> "the ease with which the transition is negotiated is dependent on the fit between "work" and "life" - at present for many groups of workers, this fit is a remarkably loose one."

Among the more affluent of my elderly informants, Mr D-, a professional man, looked upon retirement as a break from stress.

Stan, another retired professional, considered it an opportunity to develop work-related interests further than ever. To him retirement meant:

> "rest after a hard life. You could participate in anything that was going - meetings, football matches, etc. You had a different type of life."

On another occasion, he enthused:

> "When I retired, I knew I wouldn't be short with my pensions. I've got no worries, you can plot your day, what you're going to do from day to day, you can arrange your holidays, you can join different organizations. If you want to go into public life, you can do it."

But for working-class retirees, Arthur is typical: for him, retirement meant only the loss of friends, salary and a sense of purpose from his life and this retired steelworker, who had left the steelworks only temporarily to serve in World War Two and permanently on the advent of their closure in the 60s, could not see any benefits whatsoever connected with retirement.

The only working-class man I encountered who had looked forward to and enjoyed retirement was atypical: a bachelor, he had always placed the highest value on his social activities, as another forum for expression of his maleness in drinking and playing rugby with the lads. Indeed, while in this society it is closely connected with the working culture, sociability is another, equally powerful, expression of essential masculinity and masculine values. For Daro, in fact, sociability had always been a more important expression of his male-ness than had his ability as a worker and a provider. He told me:

> "I felt very tired before I was old enough... it was getting on top of me. I was struggling to work, what with drinking in the night."

5.2.2 How retirement affects men's social life

Retirement also has very significant effects on the social lives and relationships of elderly men in South Wales. Most men of this generation have been working since the age of 14 and their friends and colleagues were invariably met at work, while their social lives in general revolved around working men's clubs and depended on the camaraderie of men at work. The nature of the very hard physical work characteristic of this area resulted in a particular kind of friendship being found among the men involved in it[5].

Their relationships with their wives too, and before that with their sisters and mothers, have been both intimately connected with and coloured by the pattern of their working lives, each complementing the activity of the other. Their wives had been very much involved in a working partnership, much of their domestic duties involving preparing them for work - preparing hot baths for their return from the mines or steelworks, ensuring that they be met by clean laundry and hot food, rising early with them in the mornings in order to prepare their breakfasts, keeping their hours and building the pattern of their days around them (see Beddoe,1991). In old age neither husband nor wife have been adequately prepared for retirement and it comes as a very abrupt and drastic break from this life of mutual cooperation, common purpose and shared fatigue. It is partly the felt need to reestablish themselves "out" of the home, in the way that men are "supposed to do" no matter how futilely, that gives rise to the "potting shed culture" wherein elderly men spend most of the day in their makeshift workshop in the garden. Retirement for the husband and wife team, while it brings some relief, at least partly concludes in gloomy anticlimax, as the team, which has partly been a working team, finally runs out of steam.

As we have seen in Chapter III, men's social life quite often disappears along with their working life and they are left feeling despondent and at a loose end. Nor can the event be anticipated beforehand in so much as it is a kind of death - the death of a role and an identity - and death can never be imagined.

Iris said that when her husband retired from the steelworks he was very downcast:

> "He felt as though he was left on the scrap heap... we were both looking forward to retirement and yet, when it actually happened, he was most upset."[6]

Raymond said he missed the working life

> "because... you gain a lot.. through working. I think I gained more knowledge than I got from school... they didn't really care at school."

He missed the social activity also:

> "Me and the missus have always been close but you still miss the company outside."

Mr E- told me:

> "The difference it made to me was that I was getting up in the morning and that's it..."

Jack missed the activity of work, once so central to his life. He hadn't been able to develop any new interests since retiring, partly because of the onset of disability, and he saw a lot of disadvantages in retirement, when there was so much time but ill health prevented one from taking advantage of this.

Emily said her husband "broke his heart" over retirement and she believed that accounted for his early death (death from a broken heart has been discussed by Lynch (1977).

Violet's husband took on another job which she believed effectively killed him. She said:

> "He tried to do gardening.. but he did too much. He had two heart attacks in the morning and died."

5.2.3 The effect of retirement on the household

It has been pointed out that retirement is less fulfilling for working class couples than for upper or middle-income couples, whose roles in marriage have always been less differentiated and who also experience less strain in their marital relationship than do working class couples (see Kerckhoff,1966). The inadequacy of pensions goes far towards explaining the dissatisfaction for retired colliers or steel and tinplate workers, who are seldom able to go out with their wives and who worry, often for the first time in years, about paying bills. This again is a deeply emasculating act, the handing over of the pay packet to his wife having constituted a weekly ritual that for decades reinforced his image of himself as a capable, providing male.

As Mary E- said, after her husband retired, the way she felt about the money situation was

> "terrible.. I might as well tell you. I thought: well how are we going to live? But God willing, we have survived and we're living alright."

The effects of the lack of money is hinted at by two case studies, below. Bill was careful about how he spent his pension. He said: "Oh I don't throw it about. Too hard to get." In some sense he is better off than he was when he was working, he said, because he had less chance to spend it now, owing to poor health and inability to go out. His friend Dai said:

> "The only place you can spend money is in a pub or a club - see now, I don't drink."

On the other hand, bills are only able to be paid if they are conscientiously kept to a minimum. Dai proceeded to tell an anecdote about his grand daughter coming up and asking to use the telephone and when he found out she intended to phone Scotland, he said: "Go home, bach, go home."

Edith and her husband got on each other's nerves but couldn't go out because of lack of money.

Violet enjoyed her husband's company, but added "but sometimes you'd get on each other's nerves." The disadvantages?

> "The money was very short. We had a bit behind us, nothing much. Apart from that we were quite content."

Indeed, a consistent complaint on the part of wives was that their husbands, retiring perhaps as little as one year early owing to failing health, or pit closure or a combination of both, lost their entitlement to free coal. Agnes' husband's case is rather common.

"He retired at the age of 59. He lost the coal money, see. If he'd worked on one more year he would have had the money every month. But the colliery was finishing. And his health had gone then. He had emphysema."

5.2.4 The effect of retirement on retiring women, with special focus on retiring women who were widowed or single at the time of retirement

Retirement, in general, has less of an impact on the self-image and activities of elderly women of this generation. In most cases, where women worked they neither solely nor principally defined themselves in terms of their role of worker outside of the home and married working women invariably considered their position of housewife to be of greater importance. Unmarried women had obligations towards family members that were often equally as demanding as those upon married women and again reinforced the integral position in all women's lives occupied by the traditional female role.

Both Mary P-, a married childless woman and Phyllis, a spinster, were in this position.

Mary said about retiring:

"There wasn't much advantage, because I had to do for mother. Then as soon as she passed away, arthritis set in. Then I had my hips done three years ago."

After she retired Phyllis was plunged into the role of carer, first with her mother and then with her brother Tom, a classical, nurturing female role.

"My mother was very ill and I had to look after her, I had a lot of work. I didn't have a very good retirement because my brother had a broken marriage and I looked after him after mother died. Tom got senile dementia. For a few years I didn't have a bad retirement, because Tom was able to go out and about and I was able to go out and about. I used to go on little daytrips, but never on holiday, because I thought it was my duty to look after Tom..."

Skills were often transferable to situations outside of the workplace, as in the case of the cook, tailoress and the women who went away to service. Also unlike the men, friendships made at work were maintained long after retirement. For these reasons, retirement for women of this generation appears to have been a) less stressful b) more easy to adjust to than was retirement among men.

Iris, for example, enjoyed working as a cook and although she didn't particularly look forward to retirement, it was the kind of traditionally female occupation she never gave up entirely. She continued to make cakes for people and to provide the catering for weddings and parties of people in her neighbourhood. She also admitted that her position as housewife had always been more significant to her than her status as a salary earner.

Although Edna, a widow since her thirties, enjoyed the working life, where she was employed in a shop, she didn't miss it:

> "No, not really, because I had plenty to do at home. I've worked hard since I've been here and I was 68 when I came here."

After she retired, Mary P- continued the routine she'd followed when she was in service:

> "I'd been in service all my life. Well washing and ironing had to be done on the Monday, the cleaning upstairs had to be done on the Tuesday - everything was in a routine."

This is not to say that the transition passed without any difficulty or stress - Fox's research noted that retirement lowered feelings of psychological well being among elderly women (1977) - and the ending of their working life was difficult for many South

Wales women, as shown below. This difficulty, however, appears to have been negotiated much more successfully by these women than by the men I interviewed in that endings were not so abrupt or final and nor did their identities as women end along with them.

Mary P- at first missed the companionship of her workmates at the Corgi toy factory but was soon so involved with housework, hobbies, visiting and cooking that, she told me,

> "I used to say to myself afterwards: how on earth did you go to work? What time did you have to go to work?"

When Elvira retired as a landlady from the pub she said she felt "Thank God!It was a blessing to get rid of it." But also, she went on, "I missed the company sometimes.I used to love to hear the men singing."

Emily found it difficult, adjusting to both her husband's retirement and that of her own. She said:

> "I used to tell him.. "Go and see the fella over the road." I thought it was terrible when I retired too. I retired when I was 61. You miss the company. I was a cleaner and a cook. But I did miss everybody."

Ivy, who had much to look forward to in post-retirement with extensive travelling planned, still nursed ambivalent feelings towards retirement when the moment approached. During her leaving do,

> "I thought, I wish I wasn't, in a way. But I <u>had</u> to break free. On the other hand, I didn't really want to leave because they were ever such a nice set."

Interestingly, Ivy, a professional woman, was the only woman to have directly expressed her feelings regarding retirement in terms of "freedom": Stan, a professional man, was

the only other who implicitly expressed the same idea. None of the working-class men, despite the physically demanding and burdensome nature of their work, appeared to have looked on retirement as liberation.

Where both husband and wife had worked outside the home, in some cases, due to age disparity, the wife continued to work after her husband's retirement. Although some researchers have seen this as problematical (see Lee and Shehan,1989), it does not appear so in the South Wales community where, as has been detailed in Chapter II,the emphasis throughout the life cycle has been on marriage as a partnership to which both partners contribute equal amounts. It is through the functioning of this partnership that a definite sense of fulfilment can be attained by both parties.

Even for those working women who were widowed or single, the onset of retirement was not overwhelming as, among other things, they continued assiduously to cultivate friendships and interests made at work, which, unlike the men's friendship, transcend the circumstances in which they were originally forged. Several, for example, have been profoundly involved in church activities and voluntary organisations while at the same time keeping up visits to friends and "good neighbour" relationships with more elderly acquaintances in the locality. Also, in all cases among my respondents, elderly retiring single women had 1) family duties 2) social lives into which they diverted their time and energy.

Minnie, for example was a single woman who had risen to the position of headmistress after working as a teacher all her life - a career she was very proud of and which very

much defined her self-image, although she also enjoyed the sense of belonging to a large and successful family. In her retirement, she explained, she kept very busy with her hobbies and with visiting and had plenty of interests, clubs to attend and voluntary work to participate in, much of it building on skills she had developed in her career, such as organisation, communication and public speaking. Indeed, as she explained proudly, "Saturday is the only day you will find me at home!"

Vera retired from work in order to look after her mother. She missed the working life and the company but maintained contacts with her friends there: "I made lots of friends - I still write to them."

5.3 Declining health

As we have noted in Chapter I old people are prone to several health problems, which can vary in their intensity and effects. However, it is after the age of 75-80 that the probability of suffering some disabling condition seems to climb steeply for both sexes. As Sheldon (1948) pointed out, women suffer more disabling conditions, especially arthritis, over longer periods of time, than do men; men's disabling conditions more commonly lead to death. Nevertheless only 11% of old people (65+) have functional disabilities severe enough to require practical support, such as shopping, or personal care, such as help with bathing and washing (Arber and Ginn, 1991) .

Many old people discussed health problems with me. Mary couldn't sleep during the night sometimes "for no reason at all. You seem to wake up every hour on the hour."

At such moments she feels "is it worth living like this?"

Daniel John got stuck in the bath one day in an incident that terrified him still in recollecting it. He explained,

> "I was in a panic, I was in a panic. I put the waters out, let the water out, but I couldn't get out and I was trying to get out this way. And I came up nearly to the top and then I couldn't go up higher and I was hitting my head on the bath."

These experiences are what may be called the routine "hazards" of old age and are equally as likely to assault men as women.

Similarly, "confusion" and "forgetfulness" were common worries for both men and women. Olive worried about becoming "forgetful" - "That's the most terrible thing." Nevertheless she had a practical attitude towards lapses of memory - as evidenced when telling me about her friend, who had been forgetting the days of the week:

> "And I told her; "Why don't you buy a daily paper, now, and you could see the date on that and the day.""

Daniel John was proud of his memory and did not worry unduly about confusion.

> "I put it to one side. It's no good worrying about it, you go 100 times worse. Especially older you get. Admitted, I <u>will</u> later on, my brain will go later on."

Agnes felt depression and confusion were potentially "catching" -and the idea of the polluting effects of mixing with old people is something shared with younger generations. She was not very happy about a depressed friend of hers coming to live near her, "If you mix with them, I think you go the same as them."

Indeed, Agnes' sentiment echoes deeper cross-cultural beliefs and fears - in particular the fear of the marginal. People in a marginal situation are dangerous.People who suffer from mental disease are "outside" the ordinary social system - in other words, in a marginal state (see Douglas,1966).

Moreover, while illness and disability and even old age itself are stigmatizing conditions,mental illness is perhaps the most stigmatizing of all illness labels - it is harder to disassociate the self from the disease (Goffman,1968).

The numbers of elderly people suffering from Alzheimer's disease are small, but increase with age, affecting 5-10% of people over the age of 65 and 10-20% of people over 75 (Powell,1985).

It has been said that elderly people are gripped by the "senility myth" (Henig, 1981:) which makes them worry unnecessarily about the prospect of dementia, whereby old people who show some of the normal mental changes of age - most prominently occasional forgetfulness, a slowing of thought and a greater tendency to reminisce often become paralyzed with fear, owing to the myth of senility.

Olive, when talking about forgetfulness, shows this concern.

"I put things away, mind, and forget where they are. And I'm losing my glasses all the time."

While both of the above are common to the old age experience of both men and women, we will consider below how declining health affects old men and old women in different ways, in accordance with their gender roles.

5.3.1 How worsening health affects the woman's role as housewife

Worsening health for women affects their ability to carry out the functions of housewife as they often have to rely on outside help from home helps or housekeepers to complete their domestic tasks. This is an occurrence which they find hard to accept in many instances, particularly when they are women who, as most women here, have perceived their principle role in life to be that of homemaker. But while they can at least do some of their housework (very common as capabilities decline piecemeal) then they can hold on to their self-esteem (see Lopata, 1966). As with feelings of independence, self-perceived health status is an extremely important factor in predicting life satisfaction in older age (see Coleman, 1984). As we have seen, it is where health is poor enough to significantly impede desired duties that it becomes a "problem" for the old person.Much self-esteem, indeed, is bound up with the role of homemaker, and many men acknowledge this also in their description of their wives.Bill, for example, had been very happy with his second marriage and described it in the following terms:

> "Pleasant, very pleasant. Spotless clean home. It had everything. Good food. Everything laid on. You just couldn't go wrong."

Indeed, declining health does not always affect the capacity of an elderly woman to fulfil her role of housewife in one blow, but is a gradual process, unlike the process of retirment for men, and often never comes to a final stop. This of course makes

adjustment easier. This means that while women gain "outside" roles they do not at the same time have to forfeit "inside" ones.

But sometimes the experience of being unable to carry out one's household tasks comes suddenly - as with a fall or a stroke. Then, many elderly women experience a bewildering sense of loss.

Difficulty in accepting their new status and circumstances is reflected in the persistence of many elderly women in performing household tasks for which they are eminently unfit and which, indeed, present a danger to them. As we have noted, some researchers (Voges and Pongratz,1988) have pointed out that retirement of men from out-of-house work and women from housework is similar in terms of stress generated by both events, but usually in his case he has the support of his spouse and can become a "homemaker" to some extent, whereas she by this stage is usually widowed - therefore it is more difficult for her as she must face this new lifestage alone, without the daily support of a partner, and indeed without the helpful judgement of another individual who can point out if she is overstretching herself. In many cases, women may be unaware of the fact that they are unable to face tasks once within their grasp.

Edna, for one, was very frustrated at the loss of her ability to manage her home. She told me:

> "I thought to move a wall down the garden the other day. A wall I put down myself. I couldn't move a stone. I put them there!"

Her frustration served to produce an increased persistence in her rather than a philosophical yielding to new circumstances.

Olive, one of the most successful individuals I met in adapting herself to old age, adopted a sensible and practical approach to the matter, narrowing the horizon of her expectations in line with her abilities and thereby remaining both in good health and good spirits. This was a tactic she learnt over time. She did possess a tendency to push herself too much sometimes:

> "I do too much, yes. I keep on too long and I get very tired then. They were fitting the window in here and I used to be clearing up the mess. And then I'd be going to bed and I could hardly walk up the stairs."

But she is now aware of her capabilities and acts accordingly: "If I can do it I will do it.

But if I can't, I will ask." She is aware, she said, when something is too much for her,

> "You know, you just can't do it. You get too tired. And you get up there and you feel: well, I'm foolish. Stop. That's the best."

It was, indeed, easier for elderly people who had been ill for a number of years to come to terms with such changes. Elsie, unlike Edna, had suffered ill health over a number of years and no longer tried to fight her limitations but went along with them. She was able to look around her and see that many of her contemporaries still struggled against their incapacities. She told me that she felt there was a need to readjust to the changes that come about in old age:

> "If you can accept that with an easy mind, you'll cope with it. But you see, many people can't. They object. Instead of being willing to accept it and do what they <u>can</u> do and make the best of it. But they want everything to go on as it always has and life doesn't do that."

It is often suggested that a modification of the lifetime "leitmotiv" of spouse and mother is necessary for successful ageing - implying the transfer of the leitmotiv of "service" from

one network to another, for example turning their attention to becoming active grandmothers (Voges and Pongratz,1988).

The tenacity shown and frustration felt by many elderly women as they struggle to do the housework, which is a central component of their identity as women, was amply expressed by my elderly informants.

To Sal, a good day was when "you feel like turning the house upside down and you can't." She said: "You just get annoyed at yourself when you can't do anything."

Mary, describing the worst features of her present stage of life said:

> "I wish I could get up and do my ... housework. My own. I've got to have a home help, you see."

Phyllis insisted that she wanted to do her own housework, because her life had been spent keeping other people's places clean, as she had worked as a cleaner in a club and a church and it was not conceivable that she should now receive help from other women.

Edna's frustration is expressed in her irritation at the help given her by (female) home helps:

> "People do things which agitate me. I think that's why I don't leave the home helps to do anything."

They haven't been taught to appreciate that when one dusts one does so by removing all the objects from the mantelpiece, not just one at a time, she complained.

Bonnie was determined to manage her own housework, despite her physical incapacity following the breaking of her hip. She explained:

> "I dust and I take the Ewbank over the carpet.. the Hoover is more beneficial, but I can't push it, see.. I'm hoping to come better, mind, I'm struggling hard."

For those who find difficulty in doing all their housework unaided, there is consolation, especially if they are very old, in the tasks they are still able to undertake.

Although Minnie couldn't push a hoover, she did some dusting and "a little bit of cooking in the microwave", and pointed out that she was doing all her own housework till she fell four years ago, but doesn't mind being helped now (in view of her advanced age and the fact that she was the last surviving member of her family, having nursed her sisters through their last illnesses, so in a sense she has hardly been "defeated" by this).

There is no doubt, indeed, that ability to manage one's household remains a core element of women's identity and conceptions of themselves as women in old age, as the following case amply illustrates:

Olive said:

> "I can manage to cook my own food and do my dusting and a year ago I decorated this kitchen - it took me three weeks to do it.. I don't ask my housekeeper to do anything unless I can't do it."

She continues to make the effort to cook dishes for herself. She cooks a Sunday dinner every week, for example, even though it makes her very tired. On weekends, when she is more tired than usual, she summons her resourcefulness into play,cooking the dinner

n Saturdays and heating it up again on Sundays after she came home from church. She also enjoyed cooking for others, taking along sweet dishes to her Old Age Clubs and W.I. meetings:

> "I'm a crackhand at pikelets, so they tell me. I've never brought one home yet, anyway!"

she told me proudly. But she was aware that not all of her contemporaries took as much trouble to keep up the old routines now that, only having oneself to worry about, they no longer signified anything. Olive said:

> "I've got a friend who lives on a Marie biscuit and a cup of tea and you ought to see her. She's like a skeleton."

5.3.2 How it affects women's "public persona" and sociability in terms of

i) socialising outside the home

Declining health also makes it more difficult for elderly women to keep up friendships, hobbies and socialising outside the home - activities that have always been of prime importance for women of this generation.

But although old age makes it more difficult for elderly women to maintain friendships, especially with women they have known for a considerable time, they appear to be very resourceful and do not accept defeat - an attitude essential to survival through difficult years. Where ill health rules out the possibility of visiting long-valued friends, a flourishing exchange in telephone calls and letter-writing soon springs up. Where ill

health involves visits to day hospitals etc, friends are recruited from these environments[7].

Violet kept up an exchange of letters with people she had not actually seen in years: "I write to evacuees, I write to friends of my sister, who died."

Mrs S- wrote far afield.

> "Last night I woke up at 2.30 and couldn't go to sleep. I got up, made myself a cup of tea, and wrote some letters: one to Australia, one to Bristol."

Violet agreed:

> "I write to Australia, too [a distant friend]. I get lovely letters from her, too. She went over there fifteen years ago. Kept in touch all these years."

Indeed, the companionship of other women and the net of female support, whether practical or psychological, remains essential to the way women negotiate the circumstances of their own old womanhood.

Some sociable old women will use experiences of illness and hospitalisation to recruit friends. Agnes made friends during her stay in hospital. She said: "You start talking to them - where are you coming from and all that." The hospital as hunting ground for the establishment of new friendships is no more than a consistent extension of the way women of this locality have behaved at all lifestages.

But not every one is so fortunate - Olive, for instance, who spent a brief period of time in a geriatric hospital when she developed meningitis.

> "They were all off their heads. Put me in the middle of them for nine,ten days. That's not right. One woman was singing hymns all night. The other was calling for her brother and slapping the wall all night."

But her cousin's experience of physiotherapy, following a stroke, was very positive, and again, typical of the behaviour of women in this society. She met a lot of schoolfriends there whom she hadn't seen in years and they had a pleasant lunch "and she said she really enjoyed herself" Olive told me. Experience of hospitalisation apart, Olive, who has been extremely sociable all her life, finds it more difficult now - largely because her potential companions are reluctant.

> "It is very hard because some old people they don't want to go out, they just want to sit by the fire all the time, you know! It's difficult to find friends you can go around with. They've got disabilities, you see, haven't they?"

she reasoned.

Bonnie found that her physical incapacity - lameness after a broken ankle - got in the way of socialising, because, needing help to walk she was anxious not to hold anyone back and so refrained from socialising in this way.

Ivy found it more difficult to get out and about to socialise or do her own shopping after she was persuaded by her daughter to give up driving even though "I'd never had an accident and I'd been driving before I was 30." But, she explained, they were going to put up her insurance by 10% extra after her 70th birthday and her daughter told her for the amount she used the car it was not worth it. "So I thought: yes, I suppose so. So I sold it."

Ivy appeared not to have properly reconciled herself to the loss of her vehicle, which had left her on the outer margins when previously she had been able to fully participate. The way she put it was, in the typically understated manner of old people expressing things which come close to the heart,

> "Oh, but it took some getting used to, not having a car. It was a damn nuisance."

ii) Self-image and caring for personal appearance

This lessened ability and opportunity to mix with others is also combined with the increasing difficulty in looking after their own personal appearance, which again is a vitally important ingredient in the self-image of an elderly woman(no less so, indeed, than at any other age). Consider this anecdote, told me by Iris, who seemed to sparkle as she described her enjoyment of cosmetics in youth:

> "When we were first married my husband didn't much like makeup. I was 17 when I got married. I said I couldn't do without my makeup. And he said: "Well, you're going to have to!" And he threw it on the fire. So I thought this over. I thought - well what am I going to do? I don't want a big row. So what I done, he'd go to work, I'd get my work done, I'd put a bit of makeup on, chat to my neighbours, and just as he was coming home from work I'd wash my face and I'd be sitting there all drab..So this went on for a week. Then he took me to Woolworth's counter and he said: "Iris, I think you'd better stop by here, I think you need something." He said: "I haven't liked the way you've been looking this last week, you always used to look nice when I came back from work, now you look terrible." I had my makeup back and I had no big row, nothing!"

However, when I met her she was no longer using makeup, claiming not to be interested in it anymore.

However, Minnie, on the several occasions that I spoke with her, was always very smartly and thoughtfully dressed. She wore twin sets, costume jewellery, a touch of lipstick and

favoured bright colours such as pinks and yellows for her outfits. But she complained to me:

> "Some people in Cwmavon, they don't like the way I dress and things, because I don't dress like an old person."

If elderly women are not "supposed" to look after their appearance, if they are not supposed to make an effort to look "attractive" now their reproductive potential is in the past, then for elderly spinsters to take an interest in their appearance is even more a breach of social expectations. The negative stereotype of old women as slow, stupid, unhealthy, unattractive and dependent (Arber and Ginn,1991) is magnified in the case of the spinster.

Phyllis' ability and interest in looking after her appearance was a barometer of her personal happiness. Increasingly, owing to her poor health and low spirits, she neglected to pay the former attention she had once given to her dress and makeup.

> "Because I'm not leading a normal life, am I? I can't go up to the shops, I can't go up the village, I can't get my hair done."

She frequently responded to my unannounced visits by declaring,

> "if I'd known you was coming I would have dressed up... I would have put one of those jumpers on"

indicating that, in Phyllis' case, it is likely to have been lack of external stimulation and appreciation that contributed towards her indifference to her personal appearance.

Olive lavished a lot of time and energy on her personal cleanliness.

> "And I wash my hair every week - not every day because it's so fluffy when I wash it it's terrible! And I wash myself. I go in the bath, but I can't sit down, I kneel in the bath. But I slosh it all over me, I make an effort."

Elsie also made this same daily effort. "Oh you have to do that" she said and Agnes was scrupulous about bathing before bed - "Thinking, what if I was dead in the morning?"

5.3.3 How it affects men's self-image

For elderly men, declining health status and waning physical strength means that they are increasingly unable to carry out the manual tasks which have been very significant to their appraisal of their own manhood. Inability to decorate or carry out repairs fills old men with frustration or despair, and such a negative outlook may in fact constitute a factor in their low survival rates.

Mr D-, for example, described himself bitterly as "useless." When asked to describe himself he said:

> "I feel terrible that she has to do so much..I used to be able to do anything - decorating, gardening.I fixed these lights. Now I'm useless. I can't do nothing."

Declining health may have required an elderly man to retire early, thus further contributing to the erosion of his self-image. In his worsened health, a man may need to be nursed by his wife or sister, a reversal in "roles" when men of this generation have been socialized to believe their role in life is to look after their wife. It may be equally as hard for wives to accept this reversal in roles. Indeed, the physical decline of same-age males is probably one reason why elderly women rarely remarry, (see Adams,1985). Among the women Adams studied she noted that most of them expected a potential mate to be able to protect them physically and financially. In many cases, she describes,

marriage to one of the available men would have involved a role reversal and was therefore unwanted.

Olive, for example, remembered the experience of having to nurse her husband when he became bedbound following a stroke as being particularly distressing considering how strong and active this retired policeman and many-times boxing champion had once been.

Phyllis, who had nursed her brother with Alzheimer's disease, for five years, was left exhausted by the experience and prone to depression and anxiety about her own mental health. Clutching my arm she asked, "How do you find me mentally? I'm alright "up there", am I?"

Dai gave the example of one of his male friends who seemed to have given up the idea of doing anything practical for himself. Aghast, he told me:

> "He can't do anything on his own. He won't even make a cup of tea. Won't attempt it."

We have already alluded to the fact that Jack was one 86 year-old who, although disabled with an amputated leg, was nevertheless determined that he was not going to give in, and yield to an emasculating passivity. This battle in itself heightened his self-image and he was able to reassure himself that he'd made a success of his current lifestage and acted in a manly way. By going upstairs, bathing himself, making tea and coffee, he was defying the advice of his District Nurse and G.P. But still he could boast

"Some people I know, they've got to be waited on hand and foot. You've nearly got to clean them when they go to the toilet."

Adding, "I'm not a boy, I'm not a fellow like that. I stick it." For this, he received recognition from others, which pleased him a lot.

"Everybody asks me, "How do you do it Jack?" "Well," I said, "There's a hymn in the Bible called Fight the Good Fight." And by God - what's-her-name, Madge over there - told me, "You are doing it, " she said. I said, "Thanks very much.""

Daniel John is equally as determined so far as his mobility and physical strength are concerned. Although extremely frail and shaky on his legs, with a thinness approaching emaciation, he nevertheless does his exercises - which consist of mini squats and side-kicking, as he demonstrated to me - twice or three times a day. By so doing, he feels confident he will retain his mobility following a hip operation.

"Because if I sit down like a lot of people do:"Oh my legs are bad! Oh my hips are bad!" "

In the mornings, he tunes his radio to a local, pop-playing commercial station and dances in the scullery,imagining he is on a ballroom dance floor with a partner and pinching the behinds of the imaginary ladies. He looks at other people his age and sees himself in a better position: "You can say 90% of them, they're not the same as me."

It may not be a coincidence that Jack and Daniel John, of all the widowers I met, certainly the two who showed the most tenacious and enthusiastic grip on their male identities, were the only two to have acquired girlfriends during the course of this study. Although their friendships with these women in both cases were light-hearted, non-serious affairs, nevertheless they reflect the extent to which both men continued to look upon themselves as masculine beings.

5.4 Marital relationships in old age

5.4.1 Positive and negative aspects associated with the marital relationship in old age

We have already discussed the fact that advanced age brings the event that for the first time in the life cycle husband and wife are together in the home for much of the day. We have also indicated that, for working class couples particularly, lack of funds to go out and about can adversely affect the relationship between spouses - the wife can find her husband's continual presence irritating and claustrophobic, while he in turn can feel bored, embarrassed at his lack of meaningful activity, feminized and passive.

However, positive results can accrue to old age. There is more time for communication, for long chats, for enjoying holidays together. Where marital relationships had been stormy, there may be less energy and inclination to fight and argue now, and a mutual preference for peace may render the home a more enjoyable setting than ever before. This sense of emotional closeness may result in the fact that men learn to become notably more expressive at this point, as they also spend less time with the lads and more in female company, which often leads them to modify their conversational style, to something less loud, swaggering and peppered with vulgarities. It is interesting, indeed, how older men's conversational style becomes more feminine - in tone, volume, gentleness - with increasing advancement in years. I feel strongly, as a female researcher, that such men become more approachable in old age - the male identity they have worn like armour for most of their lives is stripped away and they are disarmed, no longer intimidating in their bold, swaggering, macho bravado.The activities that men are involved in at this point - helping with housework - demand expressive rather than

instrumental qualities,emphasizing expressive qualities such as giving love, affection and companionship to his wife (see Lipman, 1962).

Many individuals testify to this new feeling of closeness and understanding that comes to their marriages in old age.

Iris said: "I think you get closer together as you get older" and Dai's experience matched this. He explained:

> "I think the older you're getting, you're getting more attached somehow. Many times she said to me: "Why don't you go out?" And do you know, I'd rather stop in! But when I was younger I wouldn't need to be asked - I was gone!"

Some couples appeared to make a conscious decision to bring about a new closeness in their life together following the retirement of the husband, knowing that their remaining time together is limited. Ethel remembered how her husband

> "was asked to go back to the Welsh Office in Swansea because he was very clever - he should have been a lawyer. But he said: "No. I promised Ethel we're going to enjoy ourselves." So the gentleman said: "Bring Ethel with you." So we went down - two days a week I think it was. We went to the Welsh Office in Swansea."

After Ella's husband retired she said

> "we managed to get down to the beach.We lived on the beach since we were children.. we swam a little, but not very much."

Ethel said that after her husband retired from work as a cashier in the Morriston tinplate works, they arranged to "enjoy ourselves, in a new car he had bought, travelling."

Raymond, a steelworker, and his wife took up ballroom dancing together for the first time after his retirement; they had never had much time to spend together previously.

Jack said that both he and his wife have quietened down - "we're less boisterous now" - they don't see the point in arguing over little things now.

> "When before we used to argue, we don't see the point in getting worked up about some silly little thing; what does a little thing matter?"

Although sexual relations often become infrequent or nonexistent[8], there is still a sense of emotional closeness.

Mr and Mrs E- described their relationship as "companionship".

Mary said:

> "When we were younger, we were closer. We're close now, but not like we were when we first got married. Things are different... As you get older, you don't... over 80..Although, we are very close now. But no sex."

She went on: "It does make a difference. But when you get eighties, it's out, isn't it?"

Jack said, speaking when his wife was still alive (she died during the course of this study):

> "And your sexual relationship doesn't... Well, it do exist but... I still like a cuddle and a squeeze ,mind, now - at my age! Sex itself has gone. Sometimes you do feel the urge, but you can't do anything about it."

(One of Daniel John's favourite anecdotes was about the time he went to the doctor to ask for pills to help him have a love life again, but the doctor dismissed him laughingly).

This is one of the reasons Violet gave for not wanting to remarry. Having given a string of other reasons, she added:

> "Anyway, when you get to 77, you can't do things like you used to do. It goes as the years go by, you know? It's only these last 5 or 6 years that I haven't been able to do... what I used to do"

(she punctuated this comment with much laughter).

Mr J- said: "It's companionship now, isn't it? It boils down to that."

5.4.2 The area of cooperation with household chores

There may be a real cooperation with respect to the running of the home, the husband helping his wife who is also growing less capable of running the home singlehandedly. Research has demonstrated how the elderly husband's behaviour becomes more expressive and less instrumental, as the pre-retirement division of male and female "roles" becomes significantly eroded. The husband and wife now move to an area of common-ground, in the middle so to speak, letting go of strongly defined male and female behaviour-patterns and expectations, where there is a renewed emphasis on sharing and cooperation. Elwyn did a lot about the house.

> "I like the housework... I may be different to every other man - a lot of men don't like housework do they? I like cooking."

He said he does "a dinner and a jam sandwich." He also did the washing and the ironing.

In Mary's case, her husband retired but owing to the age difference between them she was still working. "I used to go to work and he would put on the tea." Also when he retired, he used to do the shopping.

Nor is there evidence to suggest that these claims are characterised by tokenism. It must be noted again, however, as explained in Chapter II, that this part of Wales demonstrates strongly egalitarian relationships between husband and wife throughout the lifecycle. Only 3.3% of the elderly individuals in my study - and these were all women - claimed to consider their husband the "boss" of the household. With most individuals there was a strong denial that any superiority existed between either partner. But there were several joking allusions to the fact that, in old age, the wife became the dominant and bossy partner.

Will said that he and his wife were a team "we work together" but he also joked about her acting at times as if she were the boss - "Do this, do that!"

Margaret laughed at the notion that her husband might have been the Boss. "No! It was more likely me that was the Boss." But then she continued,

> "He never used to do nothing without consulting me and I never did anything without consulting him."

Sal had been a tailoress during her working life and her husband had helped about the house to compensate for her involvement - seeing their son off to work and making breakfast for her. She said "There was no bosses in our house. The only boss was my child!"

Menna was firm:

> "Not one of us Boss. If he wanted to go somewhere he could go. If I wanted to go, I was going. Not one of us "boss"..."

Raymond explained: "We always worked together." He added: "I would consider 70% of my friends would consider their wives equal."

The nature of the hard physical work involved in the men's careers to be found here demands cooperation and partnership between both parties, though in old age it is true that men have more time to help their wives, with the emphasis on mutual help remaining strongly defined.

However, in sickness, all the burden of housework falls on one partner. Olive said:

> "While he was alive - he was paralysed for 9½ years - I had to make everything soft so he could swallow it - he couldn't chew anything, see. After he died I didn't do nearly so much, did I? Just one in the house, you don't make much mess, if you're careful. Oh no."

Mary E-, who was being cared for by her elderly husband, himself suffering from "pneumo", felt uncomfortable about this situation. She said, with some self-reproach, in response to my question as to whether her husband had considered any employment after retirement:

> "Only looking after me.. and don't you think that's enough work for him? More than enough. He shouldn't be doing nothing now."

Some researchers have seen the experience of caring for their wives as particularly isolating for old men. The point that is made is that men who care face role conflict because caring is in opposition to dominant gender norms about masculinity. Male carers are less likely than women to get support and status from their male peers, for undertaking the "feminine" activity of caring. Male carers may become more isolated from their friendship networks because of the incompatability of caring with other aspects of male identity (eg see Finch and Groves, 1983).

But for men in particular, even though it is not a traditional male activity, it can be rewarding and fulfilling, especially as it gives them a purpose that may very well have been lacking otherwise from their lives in retirement, a "role" in a period of "rolelessness."

For Howard, it was only when his wife died, removing his job as full-time carer at the same time, that he experienced a bewildering emptiness in his life. Up until then, even with his own retirement from work, he had a definite sense of purpose in life and derived a feeling of satisfaction from his caring activity.[9]

But Bill derived enormous satisfaction from the experience of looking after his wife:

> "I had a bad time with the missus when she was ill - but it gets that you enjoy doing it, you look forward to doing it. As soon as she died - it all went. You're left with nothing."

All in all there was remarkable role-flexibility among the elderly people in South Wales. Where the husband had retired and the woman was still working, for example, the husband would show sufficient adaptability to take over tasks such as cleaning, shopping, preparing meals.

5.5 Bereavement, widowhood and widowerhood

5.5.1 The social death of roles in old age, such as those of "wife", "husband", "daughter."

With the death of family members or friends comes the ending of certain important relationships in the life of the elderly person - a kind of social death, which affects both

men and women.These relationships are often never replaced and consequently the old person is robbed of the identity he or she invested in such a relationship. How does one define oneself as a wife if one's husband is dead, a son if one's parents are dead, or a friend if one's friends are dead? It is an occurrence that affects men as well as women, although women, living longer, experience the deaths of more people close to them than do the men. There is thus a need for constant adjustment and flexibility - obviously very difficult and demanding attributes to attain at this point in the lifecycle.

For friends: Mr E- considered the fact that all his friends were passing away one by one to be a very sad feature of this stage of his existence. He said:

> "As you get older, you experience people leaving you one by one. You feel you are on the frontline now."

Indeed, when I attempted to find out who was close to any particular old person at this stage, a very common response was "all my friends have gone now."

Olive, a very sociable woman, had only one or two close friends living now, the rest had passed away. Her cousin was her dearest friend today. She said:

> "I love her very much because she's like my sister and if anything should happen to her I'd be very upset."

Phyllis' fiance's death dealt her a blow from which she did not recover:

> "I was happy before Percy died. And I wanted to live. And I was looking forward to the future. But once he died, and my mother was getting a bit older, my life went down."

The death of siblings can also be difficult to recover from - and many years later, certain things can stir the memory of those siblings left behind, and provoke grief in them. For Mrs T-, singing on the TV can spark memories of her brother, long since deceased.

> "You hear something on the television - like Welsh singing - I can go off then and have a good cry because you remember things don't you..?"

Ivy nursed her brother in her own home up to the time he died. His death affected her deeply - "when he died, I was older and that was a shock. " (That is, she coped with it less well than she had the death of her husband, many years ago, when she could divert her attention to her children.) Not long after he died she decided to sell the house and move near her daughter.

> "I still carried on as usual but the place <u>did</u> seem empty. I didn't want to stay in that house, because you can see them everywhere,"

she explained.

Unfortunately, new relationships do not always appear at this time of life to compensate for the loss of old ones. This is particularly so for the elderly individual who has lost his or her spouse and particularly for women, for demographic reasons: half of all elderly women in the UK are widowed, compared with 17% of men; 40% of British men over 85 are currently married, compared with only 7% of women (Arber and Ginn,1991). Indeed, 1981 figures show there were over four times as many elderly widows as widowers enumerated in the UK (Timaeus, 1986).

Olive, a childless woman with no siblings, explained it thus:

> "After all, he was all I had, wasn't he? He was my family, then - no brothers, no sisters, no children.. I still feel that I'm married to him, you know?"

She added:

> "I think it's a very bad thing. I think it's very nice if you do lose someone you can love another. But I'm afraid I'm not one of those."

She added, on another occasion, "I always dreaded I'd be on my own one day, being an only child."

Ella recalled the death of her husband as being "devastating". She added: "And it doesn't get any easier through the years. That's a fallacy."

Although she had been a widow for 17 years, Eiluned, who was old, very frail and housebound, suffering acutely from loneliness, said: "I still haven't come to terms with it."

Howard confessed that he had not found anyone to fill the gap since his wife died. He said: "It was when she died that I - collapsed." He went on to describe how he had once called on a client, a man whose wife had just died, and the latter described it as: "the wall that you lean against has collapsed". And Howard said he felt the same[10].

It will be remembered from Chapter IV that there is another relationship the loss of which through death is equally as impossible to compensate for - namely, the death of one's mother. This is particularly difficult to adjust to when, as has been quite common in this part of the world, the generations lived together right through the middle age of the offspring, usually a daughter and where it is, anyway, a "mam-centred" culture. To many women in this area, their mother had been their best friend and companion through the years. They have shared times of adversity together and have much in

common, both having shared very similar lives, carrying out the same sorts of activities, experiencing similar kinds of married life.

Olive described the devastating loss of her mother to me in these terms:

> "I was in my forties when I lost my mother. It was like the end of the world... it took me a long time [to get over it.] I'm not over it now, as you can see [she was crying]. She was a good mother, a good companion. I think she would have starved to give me food..I felt very lonely because we used to do everything together. When my husband was in work, we used to go off to Swansea together for the afternoon.. The first time I went to Swansea [after she had died] I used to cry in the street.Even now I haven't got over it. It's very silly for an 88 year-old person to be crying about her mother .. when I hear certain hymns now - oh, it can break my heart."

Many other individuals echo the same sentiment as Olive. Men too, if they are bachelors, may feel this loss almost as acutely as women. When I asked Tom if he ever got depressed he said he did, occasionally. "I was very depressed when my mother died. I missed her like anything."

When asked, Margaret told me that the hardest thing she'd had to face since she was 60 was losing her mother.

5.5.2 The comparative experience of widows and widowers

Researchers have devoted much time in recent years to discussing the comparative hardships experienced by widows and widowers (see Balkwell, 1981). The insight they wish to arrive at is whether men or women suffer most as the result of bereavement. What they usually discover, however, is the rather different ways both sexes suffer.

For those who argue that men adjust less well to this situation than women (see Balswick and Averett, 1977; Berardo, 1970; Kennedy, 1978; Pihlblad and McNamara, 1965; Vinick, 1978; Walters, 1980), the reasons usually provided are that 1)older men experience a lower degree of involvement in family and friendship roles 2) they have experienced the double loss of work and spouse 3) they usually have a limited prior involvement in housekeeping and cooking 4) ties with the extended family tend to be maintained through women 5) they find taking the initiative in the courtship process awkward after being married 6) men are less apt to openly express grief 7) same-sex friends who are also widowed are not apt to exist for demographic reasons. Some of these observations hold true for South Wales, as we can see from the following comments and observations:

Olive attended many clubs but found no/very few men there.

> "We've only got four men [in the Old Age Club] and the rest are women. And our church is practically run by women."

Ivy said: "I think women cope better than men [in widowhood]"

Bill, who was emotionally distant from his family and found it increasingly difficult to go to his local pub to meet his friends because of the long walk it entailed, continued to look on his dead wife as a companion. He said: "I sit and talk to the missus for hours."

This refusal to give up a significant relationship even after death, has been widely reported and in the case of men in particular may indicate that there is no relationship in their post-bereavement lives that comes close to involving them to this degree.

In competition with this viewpoint other researchers (Lopata, 1979; Caine, 1974) point out that women have obtained their status as a result of the existence of their husband and now suffer from a corresponding steep decline in social status. There is no "role" for the widow in this society, unlike in other societies (see Lopata, 1972), only guidelines to indicate how she should not behave. Also, for women being a wife is a more important part of her self-identity than being a husband is to men. Again, the widow's financial circumstances are more adversely affected by widowhood than are those of widowed men. As a partner-less woman she finds socialising in public more problematic: most activities are for couples and she cannot, unlike elderly men, go to a pub or club alone. Not only that, but women of this generation have been brought up to define themselves in terms of their relationships with men - they have been brought up to be wives, mothers, sisters, partners in their husband's working life as well as in the home. The facts of demographics also mean that far less women are able to remarry at this age than are men, as there are far less men of their own age still alive.

These observations are true up to a point for South Wales women - but only up to a point. The entry into widowhood is no doubt a difficult, disturbing and confusing one - but for the majority of cases, within three to six months it has been transcended and the "post-widowhood" stage occupied. This is reflected in Olive's experience. She told me,

> "I used to cry for weeks in the night. Mrs P- next door said she heard me crying."

Significantly she concluded, "Then you get used to everything."

In this lifestage, for South Wales women the lack of guidelines to their behaviour - although very confusing to begin with - also means that women can make of this stage

roughly what they please: and many do forge new identities for themselves, throwing themselves into clubs, associations and friendships, learning to express themselves and shape their own individualities in the "open world". One might almost say that for South Wales society the social activity of widows is so widespread that it indeed provides a "role" for the widow to fall into and a society into which she can be integrated - or at least sets a powerful "model" for her to emulate, so she is not so much "in the dark" as to what to do with herself as may be supposed. Again, though her financial circumstances may not be so comfortable as formerly, women in South Wales are excellent financial managers and having run the home successfully for years, administering first the paypacket, then the pension given them by their husbands, this aspect of widowhood presents a challenge with which most can cope.

It may indeed be true that widows feel cut-off and deprived from social activities they once enjoyed with their husband: bingo together during the week, the pub perhaps at the weekend together with daytrips by car. This can have the effect of making them feel set apart from the lifestyles in which they once fully participated, engendering in them a feeling of detachment and dislocation, of a loss of integration in society and the local community. Witnessing others one has known who are still actively involved in this lifestyle can increase one's sense of being alone.

Ella explained:

> "It's very hard because you can't go to clubs on your own, you can't have a social life really because you're always the odd-one-out."

It is only women in this culture who appear to feel a crippling restraint regarding going out alone when they are accustomed to being part of a couple. Men do not experience this sense of being thrust out of the bosom of society.

Bonnie felt she was set apart from the crowd. "The crowd would be there, and I would be over here."

Nevertheless, the new "freedom" experienced by the widows can be a very positive and empowering experience. Mary P- told me:

> "Wherever I've gone to now, it seems to come natural to everyone - being free and able to get out and do things."

With club-going activities, joining Old Age clubs largely dominated by women in any case is a new type of social activity that does not require a partner. Many widows - though very few widowers - throw themselves into this type of activity with great enthusiasm, as we have seen in Chapter III.

Moreover, many widows develop their small, personal rituals that keep the days ticking over. Phyllis said:

> "I'll tell you what, now.. At half-past seven every night I can't keep my eyes open. At eight o'clock Joan will say: "So what do you want tonight, Ovaltine or Horlicks?..."

As we have seen in Chapter III, the pattern quite often is for women to spend a few months mourning after which they find themselves pushed back into society via the encouragement of friends, who are often widows themselves. Menna, for instance, didn't

go outside her house for three months till a friend encouraged her to join the choir. "And I never turned back", she said, with vehemence.

In several senses, then, the "society of widows" is very helpful and acts informally in this society to guide the widow in a direction which may be more formally and publically brought about in other cultures worldwide. Rejoining this society of female company may also be seen to be a process of resolution of two equally powerful but contradictory elements of South Wales society - the institution of marriage and the existence of strong, female bonds.

Several women agreed that in widowhood, getting out of the house was something they needed to do - a sort of entry into society and a leaving of the cocoon of the household. As Edith explained, she had been quite happy staying in the house and doing nothing before her husband died. But now "it's not enough for me." Olive told me:

> "I advised the lady up there whose husband died very suddenly with a heart attack - I said, "Now, Mrs R- , do what I did. Join everything in the village."

5.5.3 Remarriage

Remarriage certainly seems to be more aspired to by men than by women in this locality, however, suggesting that another element from the demographical one is responsible for the different rates of remarriage between the sexes (see Cleveland and Gianturco, 1976). Elderly women appear to miss their husbands as individuals, rather than for what they represent - the institution of the "husband", for instance - sometimes to the point when it becomes what Lopata (1979) calls "sanctification" of the late husband, whereby his

uniqueness is such that it is impossible to replace him with another even after his death.(By and large this is part of the culture of the Valleys and linchpin of the social system - loyalty to one man). It is interesting to consider several different interpretations of the occurrence that women in this locality nurse a sufficiently great loyalty to one man that it is able to outlast even his death. It is true that society has encouraged such a strong and durable tie. On the other hand, the enjoyment and sense of liberation old women experience in widowhood would suggest another possible explanation. Might it not be that old women, discovering new associations and activities and the world "outside" the home for the first time, have no intention of returning to a state of marriage? In which case, continuing the religious imagery, sanctification of their dead husband may serve as a means of expiating the "guilt" that otherwise might be engendered by their new freedom and lack of responsibility. Indeed, neither of the above alternatives may be contradictory but both may be present in any one case.

Sal's loyalty to her dead husband was augmented by fearfulness of the possible consequences of joining her fortunes to that of another man. More particularly, she was unwilling to risk the possibility of unsettling family relationships which were very important to her. Far better, thought Sal, to preserve the status quo. She explained:

> "I don't think I would have a husband like I used to have. I've seen with some people getting married a second time they've been all nice when they've been going together and some have changed. I've heard one or two saying: "If I'd only known I wouldn't have married the old bugger." Also, I think more of my grandchildren. Perhaps he'd resent them and where would I be? I'd rather keep my grandchildren."

Violet became seriously ill "with grief" as she put it, following the sudden death of her husband. Suffering a colostomy, she saw this as a major factor in her lack of interest in meeting another partner. She joked,

> "I always used to say - he wouldn't let me have anybody else, so he made me have a bag."

Agnes and Violet, after 65 years of marriage, scoffed at the idea of beginning again. "It takes this long to get to know someone."

"Gracious no!" said Iris, who explained that, as a young woman with children in the Second World War, she had told her mother that in the event of her husband being killed she entertained no intention of remarrying.

> "It wouldn't be fair to the other man [she had explained then]. I'd always be comparing him and it wouldn't be favourably."

As an old woman, her views remained the same.

With men the emphasis quite often appears to be on the opposite perspective- that is on the function that the wife fulfils, on wife as institution even more than wife as individual. They miss their wives as companions, friends or housekeepers.

Daniel John said about the death of his wife:

> "It changed my life. I wasn't the same man at all. When I got married, I never looked at another woman. But when I lost my wife, I thought of having another wife."

It has often been observed and is a "myth" of popular culture that men are very easily able to "replace" the women in their lives. Daniel John's views on the subject of remarriage are interesting in this respect. He said,

> "My wife had been dead for three months when I met someone and came close to remarrying her because she looked very like my wife - same features and figure."

Interestingly, however, he had a similar idea to Violet concerning his dead wife's ability to prevent such a match from taking place after her death.

> "The wife said to me: if you ever bring a woman into his house, I'll drive her out."

Howard and Glanmor were both interested in the idea of remarriage. Glan said: "Old people should marry for companionship." In the case of Howard, a double amputee, self-doubts regarding his own ability to be a husband made him shy away from remarriage in practice, even though he approved of it in theory and would have dearly liked to be in the position of carrying it out.

Daniel John came very near to carrying it out. But his future wife had turned out to be "too possessive" he said and that put him off. He was aware, however, that his motive for considering remarriage had been "loneliness.... not love." Describing his first wife he said,

> "When I had my wife with me, she had the reins on. She held me back. But when I lost her, the reins broke and I was away!"

His interest in remarriage, however, suggests that Daniel felt the need to be married, to have a certain order imposed on his life, indeed to "wear reins" and that this indeed suited him very well, just as the widows in this study have very much enjoyed the new freedom given them.

Although three of the individuals in this study remarried, only one individual remarried <u>in old age</u>: Katie, who married again when she was 67 to a 73 year old. Katie's mother had herself refused to consider remarrying following early widowhood at the age of 48. Katie's own reasons for embarking on it appear vague, and she comes over, indeed, as

being a somewhat passive party to events and, indeed, perhaps in search of companionship and friendship more than anything else. She explained that she

> "sort of drifted into it somehow. He was so kind, he used to arrange outings."

Moreover, she was able to preserve her significant relationships regardless of the union.

> "All my sisters-in-law of my first husband came to the wedding. Isn't that lovely! And my first husband's younger brother was the best man."

The day care centre manager told me of a wedding that had occurred between two old people who had used to attend the centre. However, she explained that they struck up their friendship while travelling together on the ambulance - and not, that is, in the daycentre itself. The politics of the day centre was such, among its members, that a strict - and to Mrs J-'s mind, baffling - informal segregation between the sexes was followed: as has been noted in Chapter III. Indeed, I noticed, Mrs J- received very angry looks from individuals of both sexes if she tried to persuade them to mingle at the lunchtable. This phenomenon will be discussed in further depth later in the chapter.

5.6 Parenthood and grandparenthood

5.6.1 Mother and grandmotherhood

Men and women behave very differently and assume different functions in dealings with family members in old age. Women tend to have closer ties with family than do men, and mother- and grandmotherhood in old age are more complex roles - involving more functions and duties - and significant - that is, by and large more important to 1) the

elderly person and 2) the grandchild - than are father and grandfatherhood (Thomas,1989).

Older women are more likely to be living in a three-generation household than are men: 21% as compared with 11% for men. This is natural for elderly women who may have been living with mother, or who had mother live with them - Olive, for instance, whose love and attachment to her widowed mother encouraged her to delay marriage for some years. She explained:

> "You see, my father was killed when I was 14. Mammy and I used to sleep together. Then I got a job up at the gunpowder factory at Pontneddfechan. So my money was keeping the home going."

She continued:

> "And I had my mother and I was in no hurry to get married, you could say. I was terrified of leaving my mother alone!"

So mother moved in with Olive and her new husband and remained with them till she died.

Daughters maintain closer relationships with their mothers than with their fathers (see Rosser and Harris,1965) - although they visit their elderly fathers and help with shopping and cleaning, they will share more social activities with their elderly mothers, such as afternoons in town shopping, evenings spent at restaurants. Grandmothers tend to be particularly close to their grandchildren in South Wales and to have warmer, more informal relationships with their grandchildren than do grandfathers. Grandmothers tend to maintain friendships with their grandchildren when the latter grow up.

We can allude here to illustrations that have been cited elsewhere in the text, but of which it may be useful to be reminded.

To Elvira, whose only son was dead, the visits of her granddaughter and great grandson were the highlights of her life. At the same time, however, she feared she was a burden on her granddaughter, although she conceded that the granddaughter would not see it that way.

Edna and her grand daughter were in the habit of giving each other thoughtful gifts and had a deep mutual regard for one another.

During the immediate period following her bereavement, Elsie's eldest grandson appeared to be attempting to fill the void left by the death of her husband in her life.

Lillian Troll (1980) has observed that families in our western society tend to be female-linked. This is certainly true for South Wales. Often, elderly women in South Wales work together with their daughters in helping to raise a family, especially if the daughter is working (see Young and Willmott, 1957; Wood and Robertson, 1976). This partnership was something elderly women often grew up with, their first home after marriage often being their parental home.

With Agnes, when she was newly married her mother did the housework for her. Later, when her husband died and she went to live back in the house of her mother, she started tailoring and her mother took care of the housework.

Edna presents a very vivid example of this pattern of mother-daughter partnership and female solidarity in the matter of raising the grandchildren. When Edna's daughter divorced, Edna decided to look after her young children and let Marian go out to work.

> "I felt at the time she's young , she's tied with the children. He's free enough of course. I thought I'd give her a couple of years' freedom and let her go back to her job. So she was in her job then for about seventeen years and I had the kids..."

Phyllis and her sister Joan experienced this motherly help. Phyllis said:

> "My mother wouldn't let us do much in the house. She did the cooking, the housework, everything. So we'd come home from the factory and my mother would have everything ready. "

In advanced age, Phyllis was helped by Joan, continuing the pattern of female cooperation and solidarity.

As we have described in Chapter III, the role of grandparent appears to be slightly less important to elderly women than the role of parent, and less important to men than to women. When asked to name the individual of greatest importance in their lives, elderly people with both children and grandchildren invariably named a child, only in one case did an individual name a grandchild. Elderly men admitted that their wives appeared to have a closer, more informal relationship with their grandchildren, probably because the nurturing role is something with which wives are far more familiar than husbands of this generation. But several elderly women claimed that their husbands indulged and spoiled their grandchildren more than they did (Thomas, 1986). This could be the consequence of men's increasing expressivity in old age and their search for new roles and meanings in life to replace the ones that have ended.

Elvira pointed out that her late husband "was spoiling them more than me, mind." Yet, unlike herself, he had no time to babysit.

Sal described her husband's behaviour as a grandfather:

> "He never went in the car before my grandchildren were born, but once they came he was the first in the car. Making the baby's food on the beach an' all. Changing the napkins, everything. We used to have to take them out in the pram everyday. We used to take them on holidays with us."

Dai "Butch" told me:

> "I've got more time and I'm here always. I like to see the children. To be honest I made more fuss over my grandchildren than I did with my daughters."

Daniel John felt much the same. He said:

> "When you're a father, you've got to teach them what's right and what's wrong. But when you're a grandfather if you see your son or daughter slapping the children, you step in: "Don't do that, don't do that! You would do that to your own children. The love is for the grandchildren. I love my grandchildren, I love them."

He acknowledged that his wife's behaviour as a grandmother was different to this.

> "Oh yes. When the grandchildren do something wrong she said: "Don't do that. But I don't. I say: let them enjoy themselves."

5.6.2 The differences between grandmotherhood and grandfatherhood

There are also differences between the functions performed by a grandmother and by a grandfather: Jack, one of my elderly informants, explained how his wife enjoyed chatting warmly to their grandchildren who were always on the telephone to her, but he saw his role as a grandfather as one of giving advice, both financial and educational. The advisory role is something that many grandfathers appeared to be very comfortable with.

However, despite the undoubtedly warm and affectionate nature of grandmother-grandchild relationships in South Wales, one must be careful not to underestimate the power and strength of the matriarchy in South Wales. The matriarchy has, after all, run the home, managed the money, brought up the children and seen the men to and from work. Mrs T- was brought up in a three generation home and said

> "My grandmother was a very strong personality:Gran was the authority of the house."

Mrs T- also picked up on Elvira's point, above, when she said of her husband "I think grandfathers spoil them more than grandmothers."

5.7 Sexuality in old age

5.7.1 Image and appearance

This section sets out to discover the degree to which elderly men and women continue to define themselves as sexual beings in old age. A starting point may be that of attention to appearance as an indicator of self-perceived sexuality.

Women continue to enjoy making the most of their appearance, at least during intervals when their morale is high and their energy and optimism buoyant.

For Phyllis - her morale was significantly elevated by care of her appearance. At the same time neglect of her appearance was symptomatic in her of depression. She explained:

> "And one night I did think: I'm feeling a bit better now, so I did put makeup on. And I went to my Doctor and he said: "Oh, Phyllis, you're looking different." He said: "You're looking beter." It bucked me up a bit

> and I continued to put makeup on then. And I started to dress nice...and when I went to the Doctor or up the village with Joan, they would say: "You look nice." "

But she often failed to see the point of it. The fact that in old age many valuable supportive contacts are no longer present means that often noone seems to notice or take an interest in one's personal care, and the elderly woman is likely to be discouraged. "As long as I'm clean I don't bother with makeup now.."

Phyllis told me on another occasion:

> "I've got nothing really to.. well Percy used to say to me if I had a nice hairstyle: oh, you look lovely. I used to have compliments. But nobody seems to bother. I don't bother."

Continued attention to one's appearance does not necessarily imply, however, that the old woman considers herself as a sexual being in any way. Keeping up one's standards is an important influence in many, as the examples below will indicate.

I found Vera, although housebound and rarely in the habit of receiving visitors, wearing lipstick and with her hair neatly set when I chanced to drop by unannounced. In answer to my questions she told me that it was important for her to attend to her appearance, not because she feels "feminine" as a result of it, but because she wants to keep up her standards. She said,

> "I don't like my hair untidy. I try to keep myself tidy. I feel better. I think if you let yourself go, you go down. I just want to look tidy. That I'm not letting myself go."

She assured me that it made no difference to her whether anyone was going to see her that day or not.

Indeed, "keeping up standards" was a philosophy echoed by many elderly women who attended to their appearance. Putting on makeup and setting one's hair was a sort of ritualistic behaviour, no longer intended to render them sexually attractive, but nevertheless carried out because they had always done so. And consequently it felt "right" to do it (as we have seen throughout this study, there are many ritualistic elements to old people's behaviour, deriving their origin and raison d'etre from previous years.)

Unlike Vera, Olive was very much concerned with the response she received from her appearance:

> "Loads of people tell me, "Mrs H-, you're looking lovely today." And I feel proud."

She notices that other contemporaries don't seem to care as much as she does.

> "They don't wash themselves or wash their hair. I notice one or two - their grey hair's black, then."

Olive still buys makeup - she last bought a lipstick six months previous to our conversation - and clothes - she tries to put on a different outfit everytime she goes to whist. She wears hats to church, declaring "I'm a demon for hats" and refusing to give them up even though she acknowledges that they are no longer in fashion.

Several women claimed to have not especially noticed any changes in their physical appearance over the years. Agnes' remark is representative of this sentiment- "I don't know about that, I must be looking old! No, I haven't noticed."

But for those (as it happens, both unmarried) women who had noticed changes, they found them deeply distressing and acknowledged that they felt a lot less attractive to men.

Phyllis said:

> "Oh my God, I've got to look a lot older... well I was never a pretty woman, but I've gone plainer."

She said she was not proud of herself now. "No. Ugly. No." Later on she corrected herself and stated that she had not been plain at all in her younger days:

> "No, no. I wasn't! I used to have my hair done every week; I'd put makeup on."

At this juncture in the conversation, she produced a photograph of herself. Taken by her then boyfriend, it showed a youthful Phyllis posing in a field wearing only a bra with her skirt. Having apparently removed her blouse owing to the intense heat of the summer day, it was nevertheless very appropriate to our conversation, allowing Phyllis to reveal herself as the sexual being she no longer felt herself to be.

Mary, a spinster who claimed never to have had a boyfriend, was similarly dismayed at the decline in her physical attractiveness. Remarking that she has got thinner and smaller she explained,

> "I used to have a big bust and everything. [Now] its not natural, it's all bones. You know, when you wash yourself, you feel all the bones sticking out."

5.7.2 Courting/flirting relationships

Flirtation, although it appears to be harmless and generally lacking in ulterior motives, is common among old men and women. Usually, neither party appears to take it seriously. There is a feeling that any serious intentions belonged by and large to the past.

There were old men in the sheltered apartments where Agnes was living who joked about marrying some of the ladies or being "in every night" with a woman. But Agnes was certain they didn't mean it. The reason? "They're old crocks. And I'm an old crock." The men "say comical things; for us all," she added. "Not when we're on our own, though."

Dai "Butch" said about the women in the residential home he visited in the evenings:

> "They're geriatric they are, all the ladies. They don't know where they are, there."

Bill agreed:

> "They've had their life. You ask any of them - they'll tell you they've had their life and they don't want to start another one."

Occasionally, however, one or other party does take it seriously. The party who did not originally read anything into it will then withdraw into unapproachable detachment, or else make light of it.

For Bill, the neutral zone of the bus taking them to the day centre - where it was permissible to break the socially prescribed "sex-segregation" of the Centre itself - was the place he chose to talk to some of the ladies. He was trying to get rid of some keepsakes and said he wanted them to go to a good home. One 86 year old woman, who

accepted one, later told him that she'd put them in pride of place on her mantelpiece. Whereupon Bill, who sensed her greater interest in the friendship, drew back from her and never spoke to her again.

Not only the day centre, but the day hospital appeared to carry similar codes of behaviour, according to Violet: the women sat only with each other, as did the men. Violet went on to relate an incident to me whereby one day she did talk to a man there, who told her she'd made his day by so doing. Indeed, there is a sense in which many old men and women feel locked into the old patterns of behaviour ordained by past society and cannot free themselves from these codes even if they should wish to.

Dai made a joke about an experience of his that resembled Bill's.

> "I spoke to one, pulling her leg, see. I told her: we intend getting married. She said: "I wouldn't mind getting married again to you.""

Daniel John, however, spoke in wistful tones when describing to me how his overtures to women he met were not taken seriously. My transcript of this part of the conversation runs as follows:

> Daniel: "I love talking to women, including in G- [day centre]-I'm a bugger for women! Sometimes, something might come through my mind: yes, why not, why not! I've asked two of them: why don't you come with me? Why don't you come down to Swansea, to the Chinese restaurant? Have you ever been to the Chinese? - no - well come down with me, then."
>
> Me: "Have they ever come with you?"
>
> Daniel: "No" (laughs but looks sad at the same time.)

There is an acknowledgement among some that even should they be interested in striking up a relationship they are not really "fit" for one. Violet, who had recently had

a colostomy, explained her female friend's dalliance with a man with: "But listen, she's the only one who's tidy up here."

This reasoning applied to the two of my informants who acquired "girlfriends" over the course of the three years I visited them. Daniel John's had been an old flame of his when he was 20 and she was 16, but then he had been rejected. Now, their relationship extended no further than their once weekly meetings at the local daycentre. Daniel had no other plans for them because of her state of health and his inability to care for her. As with Glan and Mary, their relationship was in the nature of something platonic, with flirtatious elements - he said,

> "Well, I <u>call</u> her "girlfriend" because up there we're sitting by each other, we chat together [in the daycentre]... I call her girlfriend, whatever it is."

Other people seemed intent on investing it with greater significance than they did themselves, thereby making it a talking point for others at the daycentre. As he related, ""Oh, here they come!" And "When are you two going to get married!""

But Daniel John was aware that he was unable to give her the help and support that she required in her state of health and was not prepared to consider marriage on those grounds at least. The way he saw it, in his current state of health he would be unable to fulfil his classic male duties towards her - including protecting, supporting and providing for her. He could not conceive of his role in a marriage situation in any other terms.

Jack too, while enjoying the experience of having a girlfriend, felt very much the same as Daniel essentially and this was why he too fostered no plans for this friendship. While

he said "noone will take her place", referring to a photograph of his late wife, what he seemed to mean was that his days as a husband were over. At times he appeared astonished that a woman more than twenty years younger than him at 86, should be interested in him.

> "I told her - I said, "Look love, if you shot off tomorrow and said "Jack, I've got a younger man in view" I'd say, "Good luck to you, love." "

Later he exclaimed, "Oh Jesus! Who the hell wants a man 80 year old and with one leg!"

Similarly, Howard and his wife had discussed the possibility of remarriage should one of them die.

> "We discussed that. And we both agreed that if we found somebody we liked, we'd marry - that we were free to marry."

But when it came to it, as a double amputee in a wheelchair, Howard did not feel he was suited to another relationship unless it incorporated friendship alone. He said:

> "I prefer women's company to men's company, chiefly because most men discuss sport and I'm not interested in it."

So what he would have liked, at this point, was a companionship relationship with a woman.

> "I like a friend, even if we didn't marry. If I could find a friend that would stay with me - that would be nice."

Nevertheless, despite the separation that takes place voluntarily between the sexes in day centres and day hospitals and is a throwback to earlier days, both men and women who talked to me acknowledged deriving some enjoyment from the company of the other sex.

Olive, discussing her Old Age Club, told me that there were only about four men there altogether, the rest being women. She said she liked talking to them:

> "I know some very nice men in the whist drive, mind. Very pleasant men there. And it's a nice change to talk to a man, isn't it?"

She added, laughing at herself,

> "I'm very backward with men. I was a very shy girl. How I went with Rhys I'll never know."

It is, indeed, a "change" for many elderly women to talk to a man when one considers the male-female ratios in old age. Figures from the Central Statistical Office show women outnumber men in old age by more than 2:1 over the age of 75 (Fennell, Phillipson, Evers ,1988). This is even more the case at Olive's age - a woman approaching 90. While there are 25% more "young elderly" women than men in Britain, among the very elderly there are now three times more women then men over 85 (Arber and Ginn,1991).

Many elderly men also claimed to enjoy the company of women. Daniel John felt that it was necessary, even when at the age of 84 you kept it in the realm of imagination, for a man to be interested in a woman. He said:

> "When a man is come that age and.. he can't think of sex, then he won't live long."

5.8 Definitions of masculinity and femininity in old age

Cross-culturally, women are seen to become increasingly virile and self-assertive at the far end of the lifespan (Brenneis, 1975; Gutmann, 1985; Cooper and Gutmann, 1987), while men become more passive and "feminized", as previously discussed.Women, then,

take on powerful roles of leadership both outside (many women are chairwomen or their O.A. clubs or church societies) and inside the home; men are more likely to relinquish their powerful roles, compulsorily in the case of retirement, and take on those of advisor and conciliator. This behaviour, outwardly manifested, has deep inner roots in the individual psychology. Gutmann's research has also found testable psychological differences between individuals of an old and a young age group (Gutmann, 1968). Studying a group of males he found that younger men tended to interpret certain questions put to them from an objective, production-oriented perspective, while older men tended to interpret them from a more passive-receptive, sensual and egocentric perspective. A study of dreams (Gutmann,1969) also revealed that individual psychology is affected by ageing. Indeed, there appears to be greater similarities between men of the same age and different cultures than between men of different ages, living in the same culture. As he writes,

> "The contention of this study, first developed from urban United States data, has been that certain modes of relating, of experiencing and of knowing, distribute more predictably by age than they do by culture"(p1).

This change was recognised by at least one of my elderly informants in South Wales when he talked to me about his late wife. He described her as shy and submissive in the early days of their marriage. But clearly a change had occurred in the balance of power during the course of their married life together because later on in the conversation he spoke of his fear of death, owing to the prospect of his wife waiting for him at the Pearly Gates with a rolling pin. The balance of power changes because women are able to flourish in those areas which have been allocated to them from the start - presiding over the home, attending clubs and meetings, while men have very few, if any, areas left in which they can excel at this point.

The abrupt or gradual decline or ending of activities and relationships fostered throughout their lives up to old age means that elderly men and elderly women cannot define themselves in the terms that bestowed an order and pattern on their lives up through middle-age. If men work, socialise in clubs and come home to eat and sleep, elderly men who are retired, who cannot even do manual work for leisure purposes because they lack vitality, and who spend most of their time in the home with the wife, cannot be MEN. Likewise if women up through middle age have defined themselves as wives, active mothers and grandmothers and efficient housekeepers, then elderly women whose husbands have died, who are only capable of receiving rather than giving help to their offspring, and who are incapable of performing household duties any longer, cannot be WOMEN. Elderly men and women therefore must shift their expectations of themselves and adapt their definitions to match their circumstances. As Myerhoff and Simic (1978) describe, for ageing to be carried out successfully it is necessary for an elderly individual to behave in such a way as to provide new standards and desires for himself as the old ones become unattainable, generating from within appropriate measures of accomplishment and worth in a continual process of discarding and creating. This applies to conceptions of masculinity and femininity as much as anything else.

Women on the whole seem to be more successful in this function, building on old activities and shifting these from side stage into centre stage. For women these activities are particularly connected with friendship and club member activities and involvement with family.

We have already referred to the ability of certain individuals in this study to adapt to the changes brought about by failing health. The necessity to adapt cuts across all areas of life experience, for old people, including social life, family life, and the perceptions of masculinity and femininity that inform them.

Mrs J- explained:

> "We booked to go this year to my niece's luxury caravan - but we failed to go. Dai was ill and my legs were with ulcers so I was having nursing every day. We were disappointed - greatly disappointed. We thought we'd have a fortnight down in Porthcawl. But it didn't come to pass. We had to accept it."

Failing health prevented Edith from going out and socialising. She told me:

> "I am supposed to go every other Thursday to Birchgrove OAP Club. But I need someone to help me undress afterwards, so I don't go anywhere."

Jack could not understand why an age peer of his was unable to make the best of his current circumstances. The anecdote he told me explained:

> "He's very agitated - nasty to his wife. I don't know why. I said: "Bryn, what the hell's wrong with you, man?" He said: "Oh she's bloody hopeless, John." I said: "Don't be so bloody daft. You've got a spotless home, "I said, "plenty of good grub. You've got good health also, " I said. "What if you were like me? Wife in a Home. One leg. And I've got glaucoma in my eyes." "Oh I couldn't be as happy as you, Jack." "Really speaking, I'm not very happy, " I said. "But you've got to stick it, haven't you?""

Minnie, a very positive-thinking woman, was also able to transform the advent of poor health into a positive experience. She was able to use her encounter with illness to demonstrate to herself and others the character strengths she had built up over the years, and at the same time to win the admiration of two senior doctors - something that gave her enormous satisfaction, perhaps from a feminine point of view as well.

> "I've had illnesses galore and I had a colostomy two years ago and I arranged to have my eyes attended to. And the two consultants asked me what my secret was, that I was taking things so matter-of-factly. Both of them! And one was in Neath, the other was in Swansea, and neither had any connection with one another. And they told me - and I wouldn't tell anybody else - they both used the same word - I was their star patient!"

Phyllis, unable to adjust to the restriction placed on her outings, felt that she would have been able to adapt, if only she had been able to make her home more comfortable and concentrated on the pleasures of her household.

> "I think I would have adapted if I could have done the house out like I planned..."

When her husband died, Elsie channelled her energies into something else - writing letters and following the career of Pavarotti. She told me,

> "These are the changes that have come about and you're not going to put it back to the way it used to be. So you have to accept this and work it out the best way you can."

The need to adapt and change at this point in the lifecycle also brings a certain amount of liberation in its wake in terms of roles and behaviour.In relation to behaviour in the wider society I observed that some mentally unimpaired elderly people felt able to behave in antisocial ways in a manner which was uninhibited. They made direct personal comments to people younger than themselves, such as staff in the daycentre, home helps - "I don't like you", etc - and were free with sexual innuendoes of a kind I suspect they would never have dared voice in their middle-age, even if some of it took the form of mildly self-deprecating banter. There is much theoretical discussion of the "rolelessness" that comes with old age and the problems that this causes. However, it seems to me that, perhaps because roles may become looser in old age, some elderly people experience this in very positive terms, as a liberation from past restrictions.

Several individuals commented on their feeling of a new freedom. Raymond said:

> "I'm talking to you now but years ago I would have been careful about what I said... I can express myself now."

Olive said:

> "My husband wouldn't come for holidays, you see. So when Rees died I resolved I was going to make up for lost time!"

In some respects, although the differences between them grow less and married couples certainly grow closer, the sexes continue to maintain a distance from each other at this point in the life cycle, which is accentuated for those who have lost their partner. Old men tend to perceive women of their age group as sexually defunct and usually look to younger women for friendships and flirtations. Women's concerns seem to be bound up with women, and men's with men. Men and women stick together with other members of their sex and rarely even converse with the other at meetings or daycentres; the fact that women are fiercely faithful to their late husbands (partly perhaps because the economic system has required them to give total loyalty to one man and one family) may have some bearing on this occurrence.

5.9 CONCLUSION

Are expressions of masculinity and femininity in old age more fluid, ambiguous and flexible than at any earlier point in the lifecycle?

Retirement for men in this society is a crisis for them and for their self-concept of masculinity, of which the most crucial elements are the dual roles of worker and provider. This concept of masculinity has seen them achieve their purpose through

activities outside rather than inside the home. This is particularly true for working-class men who have cultivated technical skills that have no overlap outside the workplace. In so much as retirement constitutes a severance with the past, an "anarchy" follows in which men search for alternative activities, and have to redefine their attitudes and expectations of themselves if they are not to suffer a plunge in self-esteem - which many necessarily do. This is obviously easier for men whose interests and abilities are transferable outside the workplace, as in the case of the one professional man in this study. It is interesting how these changes are noted and described by old people. Olive, when talking about the men who go to her whist drive, described them, not in terms of their job or profession, as younger men are described,but in terms of their gardening abilities:

> "One of them is a keen gardener, he's got a couple of hundred fuchsias. Sometimes I talk a bit of gardening with him. Then there's the one with the allotment...."

As Solomon (1982:215) writes:

> "Because of retirement, widowerhood, physical illness, rolelessness and changes in sexuality, men are forced to behave in ways they have avoided for a lifetime. They must adopt some traditionally feminine roles, become expressive, move away from a success orientation to life, take on feminine tasks, and acknowledge their vulnerability."

He adds, (ibid:215):

> "Men who have difficulty adapting to these changes are particularly prone to develop psychopathology."

The balance of power appears to shift inside the home in the favour of wives who continue to carry out the role of housekeeper and who are able to strengthen and assert themselves within this traditionally feminine role. At the same time the qualities of cooperation and companionship are emphasised with men contributing to the practical running of the home and men having time to share daytrips and conversation with their

wives. Increasingly, women begin to act as nurses and carers to sick and invalid husbands, which is itself, from the point of view of these husbands perhaps, a reversal of the attitudes which held that men should "look after" their wives, but perhaps from their point of view a logical extension of the nurturing, servicing element of femininity.

At the same time it is the women who, skilled at socialising, spend more time outside the home attending clubs and visiting friends, and generally mixing in society, than do men, again a reversal of old norms and behaviour. Women who have worked may be able to continue to utilise skills they have developed in the workplace where, as has commonly been the case in this region, women have worked in the catering, tailoring or domestic fields. This adds to the perspective of women as the sex possessing more power and resources in later life. Domestic skills are not of the kind from which they can normally be made redundant at one blow. Sociability is of great value where other fields of activity become increasingly restricted. Moreover, the onset of widowhood, which most women over 75 experience, means that elderly women are forced to take on more active and assertive roles than ever before, which encourages the development of skills that had lain dormant up to this point in many women - for example, for many this is the first time they have ever lived alone. For those who have children, they receive support, encouragement and advice from this source, especially from daughters. For those who have accumulated other duties and involvements - caring, for example, for older siblings - the stresses resulting from large demands on their time and energy may be great. They are unlikely to experience feelings of being "useless" and good for nothing like the men who are their contemporaries. The capabilities that men are called upon to demonstrate approximate to those women have developed all their lives - and are expressive rather

than instrumental. For those men who are able to make this adjustment, old age can be a satisfactory time for them.

Certainly, both sexes are required to make major adjustments at this point in their lives. Men can no longer see themselves as providers and protectors; and women, who have been accustomed to defining themselves in terms of their relationships with men can no longer think and behave in this way as increasingly they lose their spouses. Adaptability and flexibility leads to greater contentment in old age - some believe to survival itself - and, for elderly men and elderly women, this means adjusting their behaviour so it is neither so "feminine" nor so "masculine" as it once was.

NOTES

1. Married women had worked during World War One and had been taken on throughout Wales as clerks and as shop assistants in grocery stores and shoe shops - up to now male preserves. But after the War they were expected to yield up these jobs to returning servicemen. See Beddoe (1991).

2. Deirdre Beddoe has called the "Welsh mam" the cherished image of womanhood which prevailed in South-East Wales wrote Deirdre Beddoe about the Rhondda, the truth of which equally applies to South West Wales.

3. Several researchers have commented on this: eg Hess (1979). Also, see the work of Fox, Gibbs, Auerbach (1985); Roberto and Kimboko (1989); Traupmann, Eckels, Hatfield (1982); Jerrome (1990).

4. See, for example, Turner (1969)

5. This takes the form of camaraderie and solidarity but not self-disclosure.

6. That expectations frequently do not match up with outcomes has been noted, especially among the working classes,; see Kerckhoff (1966).

7. Men also demonstrate these capabilities, but more rarely. Two of Jack's good friends, for example, had been recruited at the Artificial Limb Centre.

8. This need not necessarily be so. Research has documented the possibility of elderly couples enjoying a full sexual relationship: Gibson (1984).

9. Kaye and Applegate (1990) have shown that male elder caregivers believed emotional gratification to be an important motivating factor in caregiving; moreover tests reveal a considerable degree of androgyny in these men's perceptions of themselves.

10. Comfort (1977) has used a very similar metaphor to describe the losing of a very close relative to death.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

In this concluding chapter I wish to recap on the three major themes around which this study was based, namely integration in social networks, independence and gender in old age, as well as drawing out the implicit themes that run throughout this study.

Sharon Kaufman's definition of themes does much to enlighten the process beneath my own selection of these themes - she describes themes as: "cognitive areas of meaning with symbolic force"(1986:25) which "explain and unify and give substance" (ibid) to the perceptions elderly people have of who they are and how they see themselves participating in social life.

She continues:

> "As each life is unique, so too are the themes. But all themes have their source in the historical, geographical and social circumstances in which people live, the flow of ordinary daily life, the values... of society, and cultural expectations of how a life should be lived" (Kaufman, 1986:25).

Finally, themes can be described by topics (marriage, work, religion, friendship and so on) or by interpretive labels (for example, independence, self-determination, disengagement).

Throughout this study, I have been looking at the old age experiences of a number of women and men who have lived out the greater part of their lives in this particular

region of South Wales. I have been careful not to look at these old age experiences in isolation from either their own past lives nor from the cultural milieu, past and present, which has shaped and patterned these lives. The manner in which old people respond to the experiences of old age can be understood most fully by placing it in the context of the way in which they have tackled experiences at earlier life stages. Similarly the culture in which they have lived out their lives goes some way towards explaining and informing their beliefs, values and actions in old age.

In old age they enter into mainstream culture and society (that is, that dominated by middle-aged and younger generations) in only a superficial way, one toe in the water so to speak, and to a great extent continue to inhabit their own cultural space, which is what I have termed the "country of old age". This is not to deny that present day society has great power to influence and affect them. The "rub" between the two worlds can engender feelings of loneliness or a lack of self worth in an old person, or else, in other circumstances, for example in the case of the old person with extensive family connections and social involvements, it can engender a deep sense of fulfilment and pride.

6.1.1 Theme One - Social connections: family, friends, neighbours

The first of the three main themes of this study was that of integration in social networks in old age and the extent to which old people in this locality have been, or perceive themselves still to be, actively or affectively involved in society. In the terms of this study, "society" has been taken to mean family, friends and neighbours as well as the wider

general community. As we have seen throughout this study, the fit between the individual who is currently old and her/his immediate society was a lot more tight in the past than it is today. While some observers may see this as a natural result of disengagement, the voluntary withdrawal from society and social activities that occurs in old age, this explanation appears all but meaningless for this study. Firstly, many of the old people continue to engage in active social and familial relationships; those who do not often feel their absence keenly and do not, in other words, readily acquiesce in this situation. Secondly, this particular South Wales society itself has changed enormously and some of the key institutions contributing to the integration of the individual in society have changed dramatically, or have disappeared altogether.

In their middle years and earlier, today's elderly generation were linked to other people in a variety of ways. The extensive family structure enmeshed individuals in a number of attachments to others and involved them in many all-encompassing roles such as companion, or housemate, workmate and finally nurse/carer. Friendships were equally as all-embracing and durable, for women especially, where a friend made at primary school was frequently only lost on the advent of her death. As has been discussed in earlier chapters, the social and economic conditions of the region and locality encouraged and made possible the formation of such committed involvements with others. The character of neighbourhoods, similarly, was that of a network of streets comprising a patchwork of dense connections between individuals. This was not necessarily as idyllic as it sounds, however. Abrams' writing vividly depicts the texture of life in the working class neighbourhood of this time:

> "The large world is at once implacable - working in the pit is ones fate, not ones career - and utterly insecure - "they" might close the pit, or it might flood at any moment. Powerful barriers of communication isolate particular localised populations from one another. In such settings life is constructed perforce within the local world."

Moreover, connections could become uncomfortably close and stifling, a means, through "gossip" of keeping the individual in check.

Chapel and church provided settings where people could establish or reinforce their links with others as well as promulgating teachings which were accepted by the majority of people in this locality and which provided a set of common and unifying beliefs.In contrast, television, which in a sense has replaced the pulpit, has a fragmenting effect, uniting people to a somewhat diverse set of ideas, while separating them off into units inside their own homes.Other historical circumstances, transcending the circumstances of the local community itself, also served to bind people together. The most important of these include the two World Wars and the sentiments of nationalism and patriotism that engulfed society as a whole, recalling Durkheim's observation (1952:208):

> "As they force men to close ranks and confront the common danger, the individual thinks less of himself and more of the common cause. Besides, it is comprehensible that this integration may not be purely momentary, but may sometimes outlive its immediate causes, especially when it is intense."

In contrast, elements have been introduced into local society over the last thirty years which have tended towards the loosening and disintegration of these bonds. While the family still remains strong and significant for many old people there have been some long-term changes in its features and characteristics. As we have seen, the family structure has loosened, as family members have moved to live further apart and intergenerational living has grown less common. The current elderly generation has been

the pioneering generation in fact in giving birth to fewer children, more closely spaced. The end of coalmining and the collapse of the industrial infrastructure of the region has ended the cultural continuity once shared by descending generations of men and women involved in the same salaried/domestic undertakings. There is a real sense also in which old people are isolated by means of the values they still subscribe to - the meaning they give to family values, duty, service, obedience, morality - which have been radically transformed in modern society.

While the nets that once held people together have loosened, it is also true to say that the fact of being old itself, for many people, is an event that distances them from others. The experience of illness and disability, of physical and mental isolation and of poverty, together with negative self-images of themselves as "old people" may all result in reduced participation in social activities, or in a feeling of alienation.

One case study will illustrate this point. Mary was unable to get out and about any more owing to ill health and this made a significant difference to her feeling of "belonging", as she explained:

> "It wasn't that you wanted to go. But somebody would stop you and talk to you and - you felt that much better when you came back."

Loneliness for my elderly informants is the spark produced by the friction between what has been - attachments and involvements, social support, participation in neighbouring - and what now remains for them. The cohesiveness and interconnectedness of society as they experienced it is now perceived as a great loss by the old people in this study. For the very old, this society has almost completely vanished from around them individually

in the form of the deaths of their family and friends and collectively in the breakdown of the old-style active neighbouring and the diminishing of the "homeliness" of their villages - although there is indeed still much homeliness in this area when compared, for example, with Cardiff or Swansea. This sense of loss appears, moreover, not to be confined to the old people of the South West Wales coalfield region. Barbara Anderson(1972), researching among old people in San Francisco arrived at a very similar conclusion believing that the aged are a "lost" generation in the sense that they are carriers of a dying culture.

Those who can get about may talk of chatting to one or two people they meet in the street, but the comment "there's not many of us left" and the implication that there is noone else willing to pass the time of day with them was something expressed to me on numerous occasions.

One must not overlook the deeply isolating effect of bereavement on old people in this locality, particularly bereavement of spouse, but also of the mother, siblings, close friends. In a society that has changed almost beyond recognition for the elderly generation, ties between individuals are one of the few opportunities for continuity and stability available to the old person. Moreover, given that the majority of close relationships have been extremely long-standing, many friendships and future marriages forged in the schoolroom, they are also a means of integrating past and present in an old person's life. In this sense, bereavement is the loss through death of part of oneself, a part of ones history, and it is not surprising that many old people consequently sense a great, lonely distance opening up between themselves and everybody else.

6.1.2 Second Theme - Independence and dependence

The second main theme on which this study focused was that of independence and dependence in old age, including the shades of (inter)dependence contained in the spectrum in between.

In simple terms, independence is a highly desirable state in old age in so far as it concerns practical and financial self-sufficiency and dependence is a desirable state when it is used in the sense of being "sociable" and seeking the company of others. But the concepts of independence and dependence have many other values and meanings associated with them in the lives of these old people. Independence, for example, contains within it the idea of autonomy, of self-determination and the ability or confidence to express oneself in a situation with others. It allows for individualism and the expression of individuality. It enables an old person to retain power in relationships and negotiations with others - familial or social - and to experience a measure of control both in relationships and with regard to their immediate environment.

The following definition of independence is particularly appropriate in that it highlights the ambiguities inherent in the concept:

> "The term independence is, of course, relative and overlaps with a host of other factors that are considered important to self-respect and dignity of all, regardless of age. It describes a state of self-determination whereby the individual, with or without the assistance of others and regardless of disability, is able to dictate the path that his or her life should take. It is a state that is determined both by personality and the individual's social and physical environment" (Fisk, 1986:4).

This definition indicates the complex interplay of factors that bear on the question of self-perceptions of independence in old age. It indicates too the importance of feelings

of being "in control" - of one's environment, of the important activities in one's life - in old age.

Give and take, or reciprocity - immediate as well as deferred - allows for the attainment of equatability and balance, rendering the old person comfortable in their dealings with others. It is mutuality, the system on which the valley culture has thrived. Nor do mutuality and reciprocity rule out autonomy. In certain circumstances over the life-course - times of strike, unemployment and hardship - mutual cooperation within neighbourhoods was the principle which enabled family units to maintain their autonomy and self-sufficiency. In this locality, co-operation and self-reliance have never been contradictory values.

In certain usages "dependence" is a good thing. It conveys the meaning, "I depend on you because I like your company." To enjoy and to actively seek out the companionship of others is, after all, the motivation that makes reciprocity viable. In other circumstances, dependency is a terrible state in which to exist. At its most extreme it may be used to signify inability to look after oneself, to carry out even the most intimate personal tasks for oneself. At the least it implies a difficulty or inability to negotiate one's own environment. This is deplored by the old people who have found themselves in such a condition, and feared by those who have not. It is a "taint", an ugly condition, suggesting the possibility that they are, or may become, burdens on others. The downward direction in which help most naturally passes today between generations aggravates this idea of burdensomeness. Dependency can remove an old person from adult status and reduce

them to a position akin to childlikeness, without autonomy or dignity, although with a deep need for privacy.

It also has an immense bearing on the other aspects of an old person's life. To be independent, for example, in the sense of being actively responsible for oneself, renders an old person able to participate in the society in which they live. Similarly, participating in the civil state (through paying of taxes, community charge, National Insurance) can make even the individual who requires practical assistance - such as the home help (today called home care) service - feel autonomous at the same time. Nevertheless, in old age tensions can be generated as a result of seemingly contradictory tendencies. How does the old person, in a condition of dependence on others, deal with their need for self-expression and individuality; for privacy?

This connection between independence and individualism is an interesting one and one which can be problematic in old age. Hockey and James (1993:107) write:

> "Individualism is irreconcilable with human dependency, for if the pursuit of individual freedom is the hallmark of personhood, then all those unable, through dependency, to hold on to this aim are cast in less than fully social roles."

They go on to contrast the kind of individualism which developed within the "nuclear, market-oriented families" in Britain to the binding links between individuals in other non-western cultures frequently studied by anthropologists. Here, social structures aimed to bind individuals in a chain of indebtedness, with dependency viewed as a positive ideal. The systems of brideservice and bridewealth as well as potlatch, moka and kula may all be viewed as mechanisms for creating dependency.

In the anthracite coalfield area of South Wales, the old people have demonstrated throughout their lives, and claimed as an important value, an individualism conceived of as existing within a close, family structure. In life history after life history, the expression of individuality is shaped by and confined within, the net of family ties. This is seen through numerous examples, many already alluded to in the body of the study. Olive took her mother on honeymoon with her. Bonnie brought two husbands (with a brief period of widowhood in between) to live in the family home. Menna courted her husband for fourteen years, considering herself not free to marry while she was engaged in the task of nursing her invalid parents. In this context Bonnie's enthusiastic statement:

> "We were a happy family. My father played the organ and I played the piano"

takes on real symbolic value, the family concerts in which she and two successive husbands participated symbolising a close-knit, interconnected pattern of life with each individual, like members of a small orchestra, dependent on the rest and contributing to the harmony of the whole.

The change in mores and values, particularly the decline in family values and the advent of a more aggressive individualism over the course of the second part of this century, has meant that old people perceive the possibility of themselves becoming burdens on others. In their possible need for assistance with practical chores, even in their desire for company from family members, they begin to see the ways in which they may begin to intrude upon the freedom of others. As Hockey and James put it (1993:110):pellin

> "However extended the family might be its size promises little in the absence of an underlying organising principle of social reciprocity. In their need, dependent people are therefore seen to constrain others in their own pursuit of individual freedom."

There is a definite sense in which old people, however emotionally involved they may be with their families - and many in this study do have vivid involvements with their children and grandchildren - perceive themselves to be on the margins of family life, set a little apart from the fully compact nuclear team of husband, wife and children. This may be seen to be manifested in the general preferences they exhibit to remain living apart from their families. Indeed, in times of crisis during illness or widowhood, when they may be forced temporarily to live in the home of a child, the delicate structure, the balance between involvement and non-dependence, appears to be strained to the utmost.

Some of these strains and tensions are implicit in Menna's explanation of why, although her family are cited as being of prime importance in her life, she would not wish to live with them.

> "Well I lived with them when I broke my hip, for fourteen weeks. My grandson went down to live in my flat so I could have his room. But no... they've got the television full flood and everything. And when I want something I don't like to ask them, you know."

(Interestingly enough, it is often in the breakdown of the nuclear family structure that old people can find a renewed role and place: the grandmother, whose daughter returned to live with her on the advent of her divorce, for example.)

Historians have attempted to disprove the belief in a golden age of family harmony and intergenerational living by showing that in previous centuries people have always preferred to live separately, only choosing to share a dwelling in times of crises such as illness, widowhood and poverty (see Pelling and Smith,1991). Historical research into English society has suggested, too,that the downward direction in which help is seen to

properly pass today is nothing new. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Thomson observes, through a search of magistrates records,

> "Obligations in English society extended down the line of descent so that grandparents could be and were taken to court to enforce payments towards grand-children, but no reverse duty existed" (Thomson, 1991:198)

Perhaps, indeed, the above-average number of adults living in intergenerational arrangements in this part of Wales was directly attributable to the prolonged state of "crisis" in which many can be said to have lived, with the need for economic interdependence and the common set of hardships faced by all.

Fisk, discussing the interdependence that existed in this area of Wales wrote:

> "In the valleys of South Wales, for instance, the three generation household was for a time commonplace as is the household comprising the lone elderly widow today. In 1947, for instance, a survey of elderly women in mid-Rhondda (Mackintosh, 1952) found that 62% were still resident as heads of the family in their own homes - compared with just 37% in other sampled areas (London). In Swansea, more recently, over 15% of households were found to span three or four generations, with 50% of elderly living with one or more of their children (Rosser and Harris,1965)" (Fisk, 1986:16)

Fisk identifies (looking at the work of Alwyn Rees) a common economic and social interdependence among families in rural Wales. Certainly, among the old people in my study, old people profess themselves less willing to live with younger offspring than they were to have older family members live with them in the past. This does not necessarily contradict the findings of other studies (Laslett, 1977) but indicates that this location is possibly a special case:

> "... the processes of social change do not take place evenly, and it is argued that family and social structures have changed less quickly in parts of Wales than elsewhere. Such reflects, in part, the lack of significant inmigration, thereby leaving familial and social networks intact, albeit depleted by the outmigration of the young and economically active, the residual structure being less characterised by economic interdependence and more by social and cultural factors" (Fisk, 1986:17).

As the present government is attempting to force a return to "family values" by making care in the community - most readily translated into care by women - the linchpin of their policy towards elderly people, so it is possible that the advent of the welfare state loosened the ties of interdependence between the generations in the first place, making it more likely that young people should feel constrained by the needs of other family members and that old people should consider themselves to be burdens. Olive's mother lived with Olive and her husband for twenty years; similarly her aunt lived with Olive's cousin. But she told me:

> "People looked after their parents then - but I think I stopped with the Social Services; that's what I think."

6.1.3 Theme Three - Gender

The third focus of this study was on the subject of gender-related behaviour and the social construction of masculinity and femininity, contrasting the old age experience with that found in earlier life stages. This is a crucial issue for old men and women of this locality because old age brings with it the close of the official, public differentiation between male and female roles. In this sense, the distinction between the outside world and the household becomes irrelevant as retiring men join their wives in the kitchen and at the fireside.

This study has found that in many ways old women of this locality now become more integrated into society, more involved and participatory than are the old men. In many cases old women appear more powerful and in control of their lives, generating their resources from within, in a way that is usually precipitated by widowhood. Having cultivated female friendships all their lives, old women now receive support in their ventures in the out-of-home world from the "society of widows."

The most significant point to observe here, with regard to the study of gender in old age, is that while the male role can end in the working class experience, the female one never does. Indeed, the old woman retains her traditionally female tasks, such as keeping home, jealously guarding them in some cases from the intrusion of her retired spouse, and at the same time moves into a domain formerly associated with men (club-going, running/chairing of organisations, involving traits such as self-assertion, decision-making, participating in groups). One could almost say that the old South Wales woman retains her femininity, while stealing his masculinity.

There is no doubt that the liberation from earlier gender-roles (mother/wife) can be a very positive experience for the old woman, bestowing freedom on her, literally and figuratively opening doors in her life. For men the loss of their roles is a crisis, an anarchy. The official ending of work is also the official ending of his manhood. For men have lived out their lives in the public domain, which contains all that is official and formal. But women have always relied upon what is not public, and in their old age the informal social system of the matriarchy and the strong female links within it continue to serve them well and give them strength and even a certain amount of personal power.

Sexuality in old age is a subject which is enveloped with secrecy and half-knowledge, and referred to in society in general with embarrassment and by joking allusions, that is if it is not dismissed altogether, the old so patently being "past it". I indeed found it personally difficult and awkward to broach the subject of sexual behaviour and any other questions connected with sexuality, especially with the women in my study. The delicacy of the subject was finally, and perhaps rather inadequately, dealt with by my masking it in bland and socially acceptable questions to the effect of whether they missed their late husbands (if widowed), how they would describe their marital relationships (if married), what they thought about remarriage. The answers were consistent; marriage meant companionship in old age, remarriage was unthinkable. While only two old women indirectly referred to the ending of sexual relations in their own marriages, it seemed to me that it would have been inappropriate to delve further into the lives of the rest. By way of comparison, though not by way of excuse, I think it is true to say that most people would recoil in horror from following this particular line of questioning with their own grandmothers.[1] Ford and Sinclair, in the course of their conversations with several women aged over 60, found the same inhibitions with regard to discussions of sexuality. They write:

> "Long-established conventions that preclude the discussion of sexual matters remain quite strong amongst these older women, not only with regard to their own lives, but when commenting on other people and other activities... such reticence was a characteristic of all the women, but was particularly pronounced among those who had been in a dependent marital relationship and had never been in paid employment" (Ford and Sinclair, 1987:13).

It was obvious that maintaining an appearance of propriety was a high priority to those elderly women. This was clear from such opinions expressed to me as "you can't" call round on an unmarried man, even if he is your only neighbour; or that when talking to

an elderly male neighbour in a sheltered housing complex, the old woman in question doesn't invite him to sit down, so that people can't "talk". I would argue, indeed, that the desire to preserve appearances would act as a sufficient restraint in itself against the possibility of striking up sexual relationships in one's widowhood.

Sometimes, indeed, this smooth blanket of propriety, which I was simply unable to lift up and look behind, frustrated me. I knew that illegitimate births, for example, had occurred among this generation, but I could not find any first-hand knowledge of this. When women told me that they had never married, and yet I felt obliged still to ask them "do you have any children?" the women's faces hardened against me, or else they generally assumed that I had failed to understand their previous reply, and time and again I felt I was blundering into this sacred territory like an elephant in a vegetable garden. None of Olive's friends had ever had extra-marital affairs and none had had illegitimate children, although she knew of one person in the village who had had to get married to her boyfriend hastily. However,"if you love someone very much, I can see it can happen" she said, but would say no more, her shuttered expression indicating that that was the point beyond which the conversation would not go; I came away in the end with a pleasant series of accounts which would appear to leave the sanctity of marriage unscathed for their cohort.

Indeed, perhaps the cohort effect is largely responsible for the constraints on sexual activity in old age, because despite the comments by my old people that it is something they are no longer "able" to do, medical accounts almost wholly rule out biological constraints on healthy older people. Arber and Ginn, who have a brief section in their

work on sexuality - where most other sociological texts on old age published in the UK have ignored it altogether - confirm the likelihood that outward appearance and actuality are most likely to be closely matched in this area of sexual behaviour. They write:

> "... although sexual activity outside marriage is now widely acceptable, this was not the case when the current elderly population were adults, from 1920 to 1940. Unmarried elderly people are therefore likely to be constrained, either by their own beliefs or by the attitudes of their peers towards sex between unmarried people. They may also be influenced by the widespread ageist belief that elderly people in general are "past it""(Arber and Ginn, 1991:169).

A spirit of innocence still seems to prevail among these elderly widows, not quenched by the fact that many of them have themselves had children and grandchildren. These were villages in which, I was told, in the days of their youth,

> "If you were seen talking once or twice to a boy they had the very old-fashioned way of calling you "sweethearts"."

This is the innocence which could lead Edna to desert her second husband after one day of marriage because he expected her to "share his bed" with him, which was not at all the assumption Edna had expected from the "kind gentleman" whom she had thought of primarily as a companion.

This same sort of innocence, or at least non-sexual expectation appears to prevail in the later years of marriage too. Elsie, describing the loss of her husband through death, and what it meant to her said:

> "You see, Bob always brought me a cup of tea every morning at 7.15 and gave me my first tablet of the day... And to go to bed at night, he always came with me, to make sure I was alright."

Hardly, indeed, the picture of married bliss that may have been conjured up by a younger couple.

Elderly men, on the other hand, were much more forthcoming about their attitudes toward sexuality, usually broaching the subject themselves. Again, this was not without a certain air of naivety. Jack, for instance, when telling me that his current "girlfriend", though married for years, had had no children, assumed it was due to her late husband's possible impotence or perhaps unwillingness for her to have children (the possibility of his infertility had never crossed Jack's mind).

Older men describe the women of their generation as rapacious and predatory for marriage partners, both in their youths and, interestingly, in old age, although the latter was contradicted by every old woman I spoke to as well as by my own observations of their interaction - or more usually lack of it - at daycentres. It's significance, perhaps, lies more in the fact that old men continue to see themselves as sexual beings - as witnessed by Daniel's opinion that if a man has no longer any thought of sex, then he is approaching death. Perhaps, for these men, to be a man is, by definition, to be a sexual being, whereas for the women, it is easier to define herself as a mother, or grandmother, or friend or neighbour.

Another factor at work in the manner in which several of these men expressed their attitudes toward sexuality lies in the particular quality of their interaction with me, young and female. Their conversational styles were showy and swaggering, sometimes bawdy, always gallant. Exaggeration, booming laughter, self-dramatization entered into it, mingled with vulnerability, openness and disarming honesty. Almost as if following the Welsh story-telling tradition, a reaction was expected, as tales were built up using all the techniques of repetition, dramatic pause and climax. And if you as listener complied,

listening attentively and appreciatively and even with an admiring air, then you would be rewarded by a vista opening up onto a statement of pure honesty, approaching the confessional: the individual who was a "bugger for women" but whose overtures constantly met with failure; the man who was on the one hand a dashing Lothario in his own eyes but who, in a moment of reflection, wondered what his "girlfriend" was doing with an eighty-something cripple with one leg.

Certainly, it is unlikely that a male researcher would have elicited the same sort of response, but then the relationship and interactional mode between questioner and questioned must never be removed from the account of the information produced. In terms of this kind of relationship, the way old men relate to young women is an example of a joking relationship, or more specifically, a non-symmetrical joking relationship - of which Radcliffe-Brown (1952:91) has written: "The relationship is one of permitted disrespect." Indeed, this is a way which makes it possible for them to deal with an encounter which might otherwise feel awkward and confusing for them in terms of expected behaviour. An eighty-something retired collier from Coelbren, after we had finished our conversation, invited me to have a glass of whisky with him - we could even lie down on the bed, he suggested, and have a bit of fun. Several of the old men at a daycentre carried on a flirtatious relationship with the young woman care assistant, who tolerated their jokes and allusions with good grace. There was never any suggestion that they would talk to the women of their own generation in such a way. Radcliffe-Brown (1952:91) sees this as a way of "ordering a relation which combines social conjunction and disjunction" and this form of joking relationship is found also between grandparents and grandchildren, where Radcliffe-Brown (1952:97) points out, "the grandfather may

pretend that the wife of his grandchild is, or might be, his wife" and may perhaps be mirrored in the protective, doting way in which several grandfathers in this study related to their grand-daughters, their conversations only just stopping short of overt criticism of the granddaughter's husband.

Perceptions of one's outer appearance are closely connected to sexuality, and this was problematical for several old women in the study who expressed dismay at the way their appearance had been transformed with the years. One of the two women who chose to speak about the fact that she no longer had a sexual relationship related it to her self-perceived deterioration in physical attractiveness owing to ill health. Her friend, on the other hand, who was receiving some attention from a man (although this was not a sexual relationship), was, by contrast "tidy". "Tidy", with its specific colloquial connotations in a valley community (meaning attractive, nice, good), also stands in antithesis to the state of falling apart, decay and degeneration, which is a theme running through the experience of old age. A concern with "tidiness" might also have something to do with the fact that old age threatens disorder in a number of respects - the crumbling of the body and so on (see Douglas, 1966). Featherstone and Hepworth (1990:252) write:

> "When we think of images of ageing bodies, it is evident that in our culture images of youth become positively charged with connotations of beauty, energy, grace, moral fortitude and optimism, whereas images of old age become negatively charged with ugliness, idleness, degeneration and moral failure."

This ties in with the whole area of preoccupation with outward appearances. Outward appearance seems to be more important than ever now for these old people and this does not serve them well giving the inevitable wearing-down of the body in old age

(although in other respects holding on to structures with which they are familiar - in terms of ideas, behaviour and so on - has useful connotations of stability and continuity).

Other aspects of gender-related behaviour focused on in this study have been the roles and duties of men and women within the marriage relationship, over the whole life cycle, together with the quality and characteristics of the husband-wife relationship. Perceptions and ideals of masculinity and femininity have also been examined. It would be interesting in this section to look at other studies of old people in similar communities, tracing similarities and differences with these areas of South West Wales which have been my concern.

Firstly, however, before looking at other geographical areas, it may be of interest to look at a general study of Onllwyn in the Dulais Valley, an area included in this study, which was carried out thirty years ago. While I have found it difficult to get past the tendency of old people to eulogize their own experiences of marriage, my findings are confirmed by this study, where it is agreed that social companionship and a spirit of egalitarianism prevailed within the marriages there.

> "This shows itself in many ways within the home, in particular in the greater readiness of the menfolk to help in domestic duties, including washing dishes,taking care of children, and in a few cases even doing the weekly washing. There is no longer a strict division within the home" (Evans,1961:31).

However, studies of coalmining areas in the North East of England find a strict division of labour and a firm unwillingness of men to assist the women. The first of these studies is the classic study carried out by Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter in Ashton (1956). The second is Jane Szurek's study of Seaham (1985) and the third is Andrew Dawson's

study of Ashington (1990). Looking first at division of duties - it is true that in South Wales, women, in describing their husband's contribution to housework particularly if widowed, may have been prone to eulogizing their late husband in line with what has been described as the "sanctifying" of this relationship. Men too may be tempted to exaggerate the degree to which they have helped in the home. Dai, for instance, was proud of "hoovering" when he retired - hardly a significant contribution to domesticity in itself, one might think. But nevertheless, there is strong emphasis among the men on pulling their weight, and some have claimed to do so all their lives - cleaning and cooking, putting out the washing and helping with the children and grand-children. In other words, spiced with exaggeration or not, the cultural mores of this area worked in favour of men coming to the assistance of their wives and sharing domestic duties as and when necessary.

In Ashton, while both husband and wife saw themselves as fulfilling their side of the bargain with respect to dividing up the domestic duties and there was a very consciously accepted division of labour, there was some room in this arrangement for flexibility and reversal of roles, as observed in cases where the husband, being an invalid, willingly undertook "housewifely" duties.

However the situations described by Szurek and by Dawson contrast more strikingly with South West Wales; Szurek states that the men did not come to the assistance of women at all in the household, and Dawson (1990:107) writes:

> "The ideal celebrated ... is of a rigid sexual division of labour, where the man is responsible for waged labour and the financial sustenance of the family and the woman is responsible for the financial organisation in the family, all domestic labour and childcare and caring and organisational roles in the wider community."

There is no mention of equality or of an ethos of companionship among married couples in these northern pit villages. As an illustration of this, we may place Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter's description of the quality of married life in Ashton (1956:228):

> "Many married couples seem to have no intimate understanding of each other;the only occasions in which they really approach each other is in bed. Because of the divisions in activity and ideas between men and women, husband and wife tend to have little to talk about or to do together... Indeed, those couples who seemed happiest were in the first year or two of marriage."

Juxtapose the account of Onllwyn with this and we can see a different emphasis entirely (but one that is seen to have changed over time):

> "Husband and wife are often seen out together, going to the cinema or visiting Neath or Swansea, where a generation ago the husband would go alone to the public house and the wife's main recreation would be a gossip with the neighbours" (Evans,1961:31).

So now: "Companionship has become a principal benefit sought from marriage" (p31).

Images of masculinity and femininity compare closely across the localities. In South Wales, one earned ones masculinity through physical labour; in a transcript stored at the South Wales Miners Library, as part of the South Wales Coalfield History Project, compiled by University College Swansea, a manager of Onllwyn no 3. colliery, between 1944 and 1961, explained that he started working down the pit at the age of thirteen and was looking forward to it:

> "That was the atmosphere of us boys, looking forward to going down the pit. It was not a question of money or nothing, you were making a man of yourself, see"(John Williams, interviewed 1974 by Hywel Francis).

The old people in Szurek's and in Dawson's study spoke in similar terms, where, for example, Dawson found that popular local ideas "fuel an image of the miner as the ultimate specimen of masculinity" (Dawson, 1990:107). But how may we account for the differences observed in terms of male-female interrelating? Many circumstances peculiar to South Wales culture may be responsible. One such is the position of the seemingly all-powerful matriarch, not only in charge of the family and the finances of the family but elevated also to an idealized position almost approaching sainthood.

Another is the fact that South West Wales was not dominated by one industry, but included tinworks, steelworks and a variety of industrial and factory work, meaning that there were competing masculinities too in this area, and industries in which, moreover, women worked, albeit in a lighter capacity.

6.2 Continuity and Change

One of the notable but implicit themes running through this work is the degree of continuity and of change in individual lives; of harmony and conjunction between the lifestages, or of their disjunction and separation. "Integration" indeed has a wider meaning than a state of involvement with one's community - it also describes a state of creating continuity in life (Kaufman, 1986) and Erikson (1977) designates old age as a time for integration, during which the meaning of the entire life cycle is affirmed.

Psychologists and gerontologists are in agreement that the maintenance of continuity is an important impulse in human beings, and central to attainment of mental well-being,

throughout the life span. In old age this remains, but circumstances such as retirement, widowhood, death of family members and loss of physical health all present challenges to the maintenance of a sense of continuity.

Since old activities and ways of behaving often become inappropriate in old age, continuity is successfully maintained by old people by means of adaptation and adjustment

> "so that old values take on a new meaning, appropriate to present circumstances" (Kaufman, 1986:124).

In this section, I will attempt to draw out the contrasting ideas of continuity and change in two important themes in this study - that of friendships and that of the perception of independence, using life histories of which parts have already been discussed in the study, but this time explicitly drawing these parts together.

6.2.1 Women's friendships

Looking at the area of women's friendships firstly, there is a remarkable continuity in their nature seen across the whole of the lifespan. Frequently made at school or Sunday school they acquire a degree of attachment which is capable of seeing them through a lifetime. Indeed, these friendships are likely to be disrupted only through a possible move to another village or valley that may be necessitated by a change in the husband's employment. But even then, these friendships established in the early years remain "real" friendships, even if, because of the distance involved, the individuals are scarcely seen. Friendships established in the new location seem to be placed in a separate category, of

somewhat secondary value, and when I questioned the women about their friendships, it was inevitably the first category which was evoked. Many women had lived in the same village all their lives. But for women such as Eunice who had moved the short distance from Ynystawe to Craig Cefn Parc on the event of her marriage, there remained a distinction between her "neighbours" and her "friends" even though she had been living in Craig Cefn Parc for sixty years!

She told me:

> "My friends are in Clydach mostly, my school friends, and I used to go to Hebron Clydach - that was my Church - and I still keep them."

But for Edna, who has lived in the area around Pontneddfechan for most of her life, her friends have remained unchanged. She describes them thus:

> "Sincere friends from children... We've been friends but we've never asked favours of each other. We've remained friends all through life until we're old people."

Rarely going out to work following their marriages, the pattern of their social activities remaining very largely unchanged, women shared a common way of life and their friendships contributed to the continuity and stability in their lives. Friendships remain anchor points to them at times of temporary breakdown in the structure of their lives, such as recent widowhood. Then friends can step in and substitute for their husband in activities such as walks, daytrips, holidays abroad.

Individual life histories illustrate this pattern succinctly. Olive maintained her friendships from the time of her youth, where she met her friends at school, church and youth clubs, right up to the time of their death. In her widowhood, her ability to make and maintain friendships protected her from loneliness, when for instance, she started to go out for

regular Saturday outings with a friend whom she'd known since the age of 14. In her late eighties, she kept up the same pattern of social activities as she had for years, unchanged - Mothers' Union, the Women's Institute, whist. This was participation in the fullest sense of the word too: regularly attending without fail the W.I. outings to London, she was extremely disappointed when a bout of flu kept her away from the most recent one. Owing to Olive's longevity, it was death, rather than distance, that finally ended these longstanding friendships and Olive made a distinction between the friends she had made in old age and the friends she'd had all her life, placing the latter in the first and most important category.

To Olive, friendships provided a significant element of continuity, spanning periods in her life when she has undergone great life changes. Her friendships have certainly contributed towards making her old age a satisfying time in her life and furthermore they have given her an identity, where many other identities in her life - daughter, wife - have been lost. When I asked her what she liked about herself, the first thing she told me was,"I'm very faithful. If I make a friend I never leave that friend unless she leaves me."

Agnes provides another example of the role of friendship in maintaining continuity in the lives of women of this area. Friendship was more of an implicit theme running through the earlier part of her life in that, unlike Olive, she was matriarch of a large family, and her family connections appeared to be of paramount significance to her. However, friendship became more obviously important to her in the later years of her life, and her conversations with me are peppered with allusions to friendships that are

important to her, or that continue to be of importance, repeating snatches of their conversation and making fond references to their idiosyncrasies and habits. The sheltered homes complex into which she moved in her eighties has provided her with many opportunities to make and to cultivate friendships, even though health factors such as failing eyesight and poor mobility militate against this to some extent. However, when I asked her to describe herself as a person, Agnes said: "Well, I like to mix with people" and despite the losses she had experienced, she was resourceful enough to continue to look for friendship wherever possible; she identified the most important things in her life currently to be looking forward to coming to the day centre, and going down in the lounge of the sheltered homes complex for bingo on Thursdays.

6.2.2 Men's friendships

For men too in this area friendship is very important, but they are less successful at building this into their lives in the long term. Made at work, they centred on the works, the pub and the working men's club. This type of friendship was certainly strong while it lasted - in one transcript made for the South Wales Coalfield History Project the retired collier interviewed by a member of the team describes the camaraderie of male workers, who would choose to go out of their way to pubs where their partners drank as follows:

> "A large number of them, because of the companionship that had been built in the colliery, would go up to Glynneath to different pubs, where their working butties were drinking"(Will Arthur, interviewed by David Egan and Merfyn Jones, 1973).

However, retirement was followed by the falling away of these friendships - not in a sharp and immediate sense, but as a gradual fading out. At first, it might be quite a

habitual occurrence for former workmates, themselves still in employment, to call in on the retiree on the way to or from the workplace. But gradually these companions would retire too and contact with them would begin to be reduced as it became more and more difficult to get to the pub - owing to such factors as transport difficulties, poor physical mobility - and as beer-drinking became more and more a luxury on a retirement pension. The more resourceful elderly men manage to create new friendships at daycentres or Old Age clubs but many find it easier to make friends with women - such as home helps and female neighbours - and some merely sink into loneliness and despondency, especially if they are widowed or never-married. There appears to be much less continuity, then, in terms of friendship in the lives of old men than there is in the lives of women.

The experience of Dai "Butch" over the course of his life would serve well to illustrate these points. Dai had always been very sociable and socialised enthusiastically with his workmates from the pit, playing football and drinking three or four nights a week - a practice which got him into trouble with his wife. At one point she left him and went home to live with her mother, because she perceived that his commitment to the lads got in the way of his commitment to her and her small children. So important to Dai was the type of camaraderie he experienced at work that leaving the pit and going to work in the ironworks, he was unable to adjust to the new set of people there and left after only three months.

But with retirement Dai gradually lost contact with his group of friends. He stopped drinking a few years after his retirement, claiming it was too expensive, and now rarely

went out. Following the death of his wife, he started to spend two hours every evening at the local old people's home, which was within walking distance. But this did not give him much in the way of friendship; it was, merely, he claimed "to kill time."

6.2.3 Independence

Perceiving oneself to be independent - a value of great significance in this culture - in old age requires adaptations and adjustments in expectations and judgements of oneself. Where this occurs, old people can continue to view themselves as independent despite the changes in physical health and social involvement that may have occurred in their lives since the time of their youth and middle-age. This is not an easy process; without effort and persistence it would be understandable for old men and old women to remain trapped in old patterns of behaviour, even though such behaviour is no longer appropriate to their present circumstances. Coleman and Bond have written (1990:13),

> "Adjustment is maybe a greater task in later life because of the lack of supports available to us in earlier life".

However, many old people in this study have adapted their perceptions of themselves very well and can continue to see themselves as independent - which, since this is a desirable value, enhances their experience of old age. This process is, again, somewhat easier for women than it is for men, given the associations of independence with work-related activities. For women can remain abreast of their domestic duties - even though they may gradually give up tackling the harder activities - whereas men's work role ends abruptly with retirement from the workplace, and their life is severed into pre-and post-retirement phases.

There are several ways in which old people can continue to see themselves as independent, regardless of the physical and social changes that have occurred to them. Where elderly people cannot return help for help, then giving gifts of money, or small presents, can satisfy them that they are keeping their side of the bargain and hence retaining their independence.

Some women find it difficult at first to accept help in their homes and then over-exerting themselves to the point where they are near physical collapse may cause them to feel, not that they have failed in this endeavour, but that they are "too" independent. Other women are able to receive help without undue inner turmoil or anguish because, for many, having help from a mother or sisters was a well-established pattern in their lives. Still others can accommodate the experience of receiving home care into a self-perception of continued independence by considering themselves to be cancelling out the "debt", by paying for it (as is now, in any case, obligatory with Social Services).

For both men and women, even with a total loss of physical independence, those who could accept the necessity of receiving help without much inner turmoil were largely able to do so because they were able to place this present need for help in the context of their whole lives, seeing help given and help received as balancing out in the long term view.

An important means which enable some elderly people to continue to express their independence in relationships with significant others within the context of intergenerational living is through living in their own households as opposed to moving

into the home of a family member (who usually happens to be offspring). In this way they remain head of their own households, continuity is preserved in terms of their life cycle, and the help they may receive from other members of the family living with them may be perceived to be balanced by their contribution of the house itself.

In other cases, as indicated, acknowledged dependence on other family members can be accepted with equanimity if it is seen as fitting into the pattern and framework of the lifecycle. For some old people, living with family members has been an intrinsic and natural part of their life history, with intergenerational living having occurred at several earlier points. For other old people, reciprocity, viewed over the perspective of a lifetime, is a mechanism which allows the old person to feel comfortable about a current condition of dependency; this is most likely to occur within sibling relationships, particularly among sisters. Several women, after a lifetime of "looking after" younger siblings now find themselves in the position, for the first time, of requiring their help.

This is not to say that receiving help is done so with equanimity and complete satisfaction at all times; however it is by the art of placing it within the context of a lifetime's experience, seeing the consistency of help-received within a larger pattern, that continuity with earlier lifestages is preserved, and hence continuity of self-image is made possible. Adaptations and adjustments must be diligently and persistently made; for example while reciprocity is an important ingredient in the continued perception of oneself as independent, one sees in individual lives the variety of ways in which reciprocating can be perceived as its meaning is modified to fit the circumstances of old

age. As discussed, for example practical help given to an old person can be paid back by giving advice, or simply listening to the other person's problems.

While some old people are not successful in modifying their expectations of themselves sufficiently to maintain self-esteem in this area, many others are very successful indeed and this may be described as a triumph of adjustment. This is not so much a changing of values, as Clark and Anderson (1967) considered necessary in old age, the "discontinuity in cultural conditioning" which Ruth Benedict (1953) identified, but a more subtle changing of the meaning of those values. In such a way, old people are able to weave together past and present in their lives in order to establish for themselves a great sense of continuity. Although I would argue strongly that women are much more successful in this process, this is not to say that there is no discontinuity in the lives of women. In the area of friendships, loneliness is experienced by both men and women and loneliness indeed can be said to function as a sort of dipstick indicating the degree of change and discontinuity in any individual's social life.

But men of this generation experience much greater discontinuity in their lives than do the women and this hinges almost entirely on the centrality of the work role in their lives, coupled with the values that spring from it - rugged physical strength in particular and the role of the provider, and so on.

This does not mean that men were unable to achieve a sense a continuity and stability in their lives; but one certainly receives the impression that this was a harder process and one in which men were more likely to fail than were women.

The example of note is provided by Jack who, despite great odds, has successfully struggled to keep his sense of identity intact, despite many great changes and significant losses in his life with old age. In the years since his retirement, he has experienced many problems with his health, together with the traumatic death of his wife through Alzheimer's disease. He talks constantly about having to "stick it" and "fighting the good fight" - by which means he seems to give his own struggle against disability and dependence a greater symbolic significance infused with religious overtones. His fighting spirit and his religious belief in a greater purpose behind individual struggle are characteristics which are present in his entire life story, fuelled by tragedies which have befallen him, including the death of his two children - a son through an accident on the rugby pitch, and a daughter who was murdered at the age of 16. His urge for independence is very consistent with his sense of striving. Not long after his leg was removed, as a result of complications connected with diabetes, Jack was leaving his wheelchair behind and making slow, tottering steps on his own. Despite the doctor's orders to the contrary, he bathed himself, not wanting anyone to help him with this, and continued with great difficulty to go upstairs, seeing this as an important way in which he could retain his independence and reject the role of dependent invalid that might otherwise befall him. Nowadays, he practices walking whenever possible, using the wheelchair only for emergencies and even then, when in a wheelchair, not wishing to inconvenience whoever is pushing him, he will get out and walk up or over steps.

His belief that he has succeeded in retaining his independence has had a very positive effect on his self-image and consequently he persists in seeing himself as the man he has been all his life, earlier life stages therefore coming together and integrating into his

current identity, like confluences into a broad and steady river. These factors contributed to the fact that his male identity - worker and provider - is still intact too and he believed himself to be still capable of working: "If I was fit, I could get a job anywhere, firing," he told me, indicating his belief that he is the man he always has been.

6.2.4 Gardening, handiwork and the ritual of a daily routine

Many other studies have shown that, following the ending of the work role, it is in handiwork about the house, and particularly in gardening, that men's energies and male identities are channelled. These work-like activities are "symbolic defences" which seem less necessary for old women (Thompson,1992) and provide retired men with a certain sense of continuity as they direct their attention to the "work" of gardening or decorating the home.

Many old men in this study looked after their gardens keenly or kept up allotments near their homes. Old men talked to me with quiet, serious pride about their gardening activities and old women referred to their husbands or male neighbours or friends in terms of their success in growing flowers or cultivating vegetables, in an interesting and notable sort of parallel to the way they may have talked, in earlier parts of the lifecycle, of these men's ability to bring home a good wage packet.

83-year old Elwyn said to me,

> "I felt quite happy when they offered me early retirement... I can't make out how I had the time to do the garden and go to work...."

This serious devotion to the garden certainly has a ring of childlikeness about it, the way in which old men have substituted the workplace for the back garden appearing emasculating and indeed rather pathetic to the listener. Andrew Dawson, working in the North East of England, must have experienced similar sentiments. He noted(1990:199):

> "The manner in which people spoke of the allotment users utilized vocabulary which would normally be descriptive of childhood.. as though they were an oversized playpen,"

a process which Dawson calls a "cultural infantilization" of elderly men.

But indeed this may not be an altogether fair representation of the situation. Although many people of younger generations would feel the connection between gardening and manliness to be farfetched, there is a danger of imposing one's ideas on the situation, from the point of view of a "member of the dominant category of younger adults" (Hockey, 1990:178) in a way which very nearly calls to mind a colonial experience, complete with the danger of trivialising the native's customs as "quaint". One can see too why older people have been compared to other disadvantaged groups in society, such as black people in Britain (see Coleman, 1990b), also the objects of ridicule and belittlement by members of the dominant society. What must count in an assessment of its childishness or not is the view of other old people towards the activities of these gardeners - and there is indeed no indication of any amusement among the wives and female friends. Their attitude, if anything, is one of admiration.

Gardening and allotment-keeping has always been held in high regard in this locality and has been synonymous with masculinity during earlier points of the life cycle too. Olive told me that in the village of Glynneath, herself and her mother were the only women

who worked an allotment - and they did so after her father's death, taking it over in 1918. All the other allotment-keepers were men; and today, most of the elderly men she knows keep allotments.

Other studies have shown that allotment-keeping is traditionally popular with occupations such as mining, the railway and gasworks (see Crouch and Ward, 1988). Although gardening was popular among women, it was considered that women preferred the cultivation of flowers to vegetables. In the North East of England, leek-growing possessed strong macho connotations in the local communities (see Williamson, 1978). In this context, the buckets of potatoes, cabbage and turnips that were placed on Olive's doorstep by the men of her acquaintance from the whist drive, acquire a courtly, perhaps, even sexual significance.

Before leaving this consideration of continuity in old age, I feel it important to pause for a moment and ponder the role that ritual plays in the lives of old people and in this process of continuity-making.

There are indeed few rites of passage and public rituals in old age to parallel the numerous examples that occur in the first half of life. For example, the majority of old men in this study left work without any formal retirement ceremony to make the occasion. Barbara Myerhoff (1984:312) writes:

> "Retirement and funerals are crude markers for the stark beginning and end of old age; in between there is a universe of differentiation that remains a cultural wasteland for each to calculate and navigate alone, without the aid of ritual, ceremony, or symbol".

It is not surprising that many old people cling to the rituals of daily life with great tenacity, enacting patterns of behaviour with which they have been comfortable over the lifespan. Old women, for example, carefully plan their days around their domestic duties and attempt to do as much as possible as they would in the old days.

Menna, when describing how she passed her days, explained:

> "Well I can't do much because I've got a bad heart. I get up in the morning and I wash myself and dress up. After, I do my bed. After, my breakfast. Then I do my dishes. I prepare my dinner. And after that I don't do much. If I've got any ironing to do, then I do it..."

Bonnie, similarly, in explaining how she filled her days told me:

> "I try and do what needs doing... I can't stand long.. then I sit down and I plan.. In the morning, I read a bit and plan. I like to polish."

Although long retired, Raymond and his wife kept the same hours as they had during the time he worked at the steelworks. They get up at the same time, keep meal times which would have fitted in with the old shift system, even though he acknowledged that they didn't have to do that any longer, and in the day Raymond busies himself with handiwork and gardening, while his wife takes care of the domestic duties. As he told me, they don't miss the old routine, because they still have the old routine:

> "After you've worked that many years, you can't just stop in one minute, can you?"

No and indeed more than twenty years later they have still not stopped. Indeed, the attraction of ritual is clear in the lives of old people:

> "Ritual inevitably carries a basic message of order, continuity and predictability. New events are connected to preceding ones, incorporated into a stream of precedents so that they are recognised as growing out of tradition and experience. By stating enduring and underlying patterns, ritual connects past, present and future, abrogating history and time"(Myerhoff, 1984:306).

6.3 Theoretical and methodological approaches

As has been emphasized throughout this account, in looking at this group of elderly people I have made no attempt to apply general theories to their lives or to use their life experiences to confirm or reject whichever theories happen to be in existence or fashion. For one thing, studies of old age and ageing have actually thrown up very little theory and this also reflects the comparative lack of interest among sociologists and social anthropologists in old age as a topic of research. As Peter Coleman(1990b:92) has written:

> "The study of ageing has as yet generated little theory of its own and even less has percolated through to influence ordinary attitudes".

He points out that one exception to this has been disengagement theory whose application in the field of social policy has, if anything, been detrimental to old people. This theory, assuming that rolelessness and withdrawal from social relationships is both natural, desirable and universal, has been interpreted as legitimising a "social redundancy" of old people. Otherwise, as Fennell et al comment:

> "Theory has contributed to the mood of cultural pessimism about the role and status of older people", 1988:42).

Again, I was concerned to look at the experience of old age from the point of view of old people themselves, to see what it meant to <u>them</u>, as adults who had already been through youth and middle-age. This approach has been called the "phenomenological approach" - taking the individual's point of view and trying to understand the meaning he/she gives it (see Coleman,1990).

This approach is becomingly increasingly popular among researchers in the field of old age, and we can see its application in some outstanding American studies of old age, such as that by Sharon Kaufman who declared that an emphasis on anything less than the whole can mean that

> "the essential humanity of the older lives under scrutiny is deemphasized, is barely visible beneath research results, or is lost altogether" (1986:5).

I have always been interested in old age, having, as a child, spent a lot of time in the company of a very elderly grandmother. I was fortunate enough, on taking up employment as a Research Assistant, to be allotted sufficient time to enable me to carry out my own research in parallel to the research I was paid to do for the Welsh Office. The two research projects were, however, entirely separate. The first, as outlined earlier in this work, consisted of structured questionnaires designed to look at quality of life and physical dependency levels over a period of time. These questionnaires were applied to a research sample of old people, half of whom were receiving a special community care scheme in the South West Wales valley area and half of whom were not.

My own research capitalised on the contacts I had made through my work investigating the community care project. Some of the informants in this study were also part of the original sample - under a third of the total number of informants for my study were first encountered in this way. Through my work as a Research Assistant I also got to know of the old age daycentres in the area and several of the old people taking part in the Welsh Office study attended these. This provided me with a good introduction to the places and offered the assurance of a few friendly and familiar faces.

The information gathered for this study was entirely separate from that obtained for the Welsh Office report. It was gathered, as I have described in previous Chapters, through informal conversations, repeated in some cases up to seven or eight times, and no structured questionnaires were applied demanding yes/no types of answers. For the one third of my informants who also provided information for the Welsh Office report, I did my best to make clear the different purposes I had with both types of data-gathering processes. I think, by the way they referred to me in reported conversation with other people, that they invested me with two identities. The first was as a person asking somewhat tedious questions as part of a "home care" survey. The second was as a student interested in "learning" about what it had been like living in this area and about life in their seventies and eighties. To provide an illustration, in a letter from Olive to me this Christmas she wrote:

> "I was taken to our local library by my cousin Ken. He was up from Swansea and the lady in charge of the books called me over to talk to a lady sitting by her. I was quite surprised when she asked me some questions and said she was doing a course exactly like yours."

In only one instance did an elderly couple, with whom I had enjoyed two delightful previous conversations, refuse to let me into their home. At that moment, both recovering from a bout of ill health, they remembered the lengthy and repetitious nature of my Welsh Office survey and groaned, "Oh no, not you again with that awful survey. Go away, go away." Other than that, there may well have been some of that "incomprehensive confusion" identified by Bill Bytheway (1987), as a result of my dual roles, but I had no indication that this was so. I was aided in the process by the fact that the Directors of the Community Care project on the Neath side and the Swansea side respectively were aware that I was carrying out this study for a PhD and explained this

to the people on their schemes which meant that the old people received two sets of explanations; one from me and one from these care workers, with whom they were familiar. I did consider that my own research work complemented the brief I was carrying out for the Welsh Office, with neither one transgressing upon the territory of the other but both adding dimensions of understanding and experience.

Nor did I encounter problems related to the clear distinction between public and private accounts of family life noted by Jocelyn Cornwell. During my very first interviews with them, people were willing to offer me very personal information. They heaped their memories upon me like gifts which they had nobody else to give to and which they had been storing up for a long time in readiness of an opportunity just like this one. Their doubts and fears and daily troubles were pressed upon me like confessions. Bytheway's simile is also appropriate to my experience when he writes (1987:9), of his own research experience:

> "Indeed, there were several occasions when a sense of rare intimacy was achieved, not dissimilar to that which sometimes develops between strangers on a long train journey."

Nor did false pride appear to obstruct the process of revelation and self-exposure - old people do not recoil from telling me that they considered themselves to be burdens on their family, that they can't do anything for themselves, that they're bitterly lonely, that they feel themselves to have grown ugly with the passage of time.

While old age is a fascinating subject in itself, as well as one rather neglected in comparison to such subjects as, say, youth or family life, it is nevertheless very much in

keeping with the trend in modern social anthropology to focus on subjects closer to home.

As Jennifer Hockey (1990:198) describes it,

> "From the early 1970s fieldwork has moved closer to home for many Western anthropologists. There has been a shift of focus from tribe to category."

The method used in this study is social-anthropological

> "... in so far as the emphasis in social anthropology is all the time on the whole and on the links between apparently discrete areas of social life. In social anthropology, the object of study is social processes and there is an attempt to grasp how the different elements in the life of a people, whether it is a tribe, a village, or a residential neighbourhood, are integrated together. In contrast, in the other disciplines in the social sciences, that is in medical sociology, social psychology, and medical geography, there is a tendency for matters relating to health to be separated out as subjects that can be investigated in isolation from other aspects of social life" (Cornwell, 1984:1).

This method allows for a more complete and balanced account of old age experiences to emerge, allowing for areas to come up which have not been thought of previously by the researcher, allowing old people to show what are <u>to them</u> the most salient characteristics of being old, not the poverty, poor health, social deprivation and other aspects decided on by researchers in their offices or government building.

It is then perhaps by method, rather than by theory, that this study has been guided, using life history and oral history in its attempt to put old age in context. This has not really been employed extensively in research in the UK, as most research has been oriented towards the demands of social policy, with a health/poverty focus. As Thompson (1992:23) puts it:

> "Sociologists who have used semi-structured interviews with old people have been principally concerned with documenting their current situation and degree of deprivation, rather than the path through which they reached it; while those sociologists who have collected life-histories have mainly concentrated on relatively young social deviants."

Oral materials require tests of validity, namely how the testimony corresponds to other sources; and reliability - whether the same question is answered the same way more than once by the source. Thompson (1978) supplies a useful reminder of the basic tests of reliability including searching for internal consistency, cross-checking details from other sources, weighing evidence against a wider context.

All of these tests I have attempted to carry out with the evidence I gathered. Certainly, old people may be guilty at times of sentimentalizing and embellishing aspects of their past lives. But accounts of family life, of intergenerational living and the husband-wife relationship reported to me have all been confirmed and duplicated both in the literature about and from the period - biographies, autobiographies and transcripts of reported conversations in the Miners Library of South Wales - and by other studies carried out in the area such as the study of Onllwyn (Evans,1961) and Sewel's work in the Dulais Valley (1975), as well as the classic study by Rosser and Harris (1965). The data has also been placed in a wider context, comparing research carried out among old people in mining villages in the North of England, for example, and which supply interesting points of comparison. Again, di Gregorio has written:

> "Some may query whether it is wise to take on face value people's word on events in their lives. But it does not matter if some statements from the respondent are not factually true. It is the way which individuals interpret events which provides the clue to how they view themselves. The social investigator must strive to understand the self-images people have of themselves regardless of the objective reality" (1986:355).

The heterogeneity in a group of old people studied carries the implication that there as many meanings of old age as there are individual lives. Indeed, while stereotypical notions of old people encourage the lumping of them together in one category, diversity is actually the condition that would more properly describe the individuals in this age group - which would appear obvious when one considers that the longer one lives the more likely it is for the differences which existed between them in their younger years to be enhanced.

For this and many other reasons it is very important to see old people in the context of their whole lives in order to approach nearer to an understanding of what life means to them in old age. To many old people I talked to their own selves of forty or fifty years ago were every bit as real as their current selves. That would perhaps partly explain the alacrity with which many produced their photograph albums for me, and also the way in which, in the course of a conversation, old people would bring out snapshots of themselves taken fifty years ago in order to explain to me who they currently were.

Sheldon Tobin (1991:4), noting this phenomenon, has written:

> "It seems that for elderly persons, evidence from the past... are equivalent to examples from the present in supporting the current self."

6.4 Memory in old age

The accuracy of older people's memories is another fact to be considered in terms of the reliability of any study that draws so heavily on personal recollections. The therapeutic value of reminiscence for old people is widely recognised and the increased importance of memories to old people themselves was verified time and again by the informants in

my study. For example, when I asked Eunice to tell me what, to her, was the best thing about being 81, she said, "your memories... I reminisce a lot." However, it is commonly assumed that old people have poor memories, are forgetful and unreliable; indeed the word "senile" is an adjective often used to describe old people generally. But it is necessary to distinguish between normal and abnormal ageing in this context; there is no evidence that normal ageing brings with it significant deterioration in memory function. Coleman cites the literature on the subject which would indicate that older people's memories of past events, as well as of more recent events, are remarkably accurate (1990a:70). Where old people do suffer from forgetfulness, he points out, this is usually with regard to the ability to remember data like names and numbers.

> "When it comes to remembering factual information, like what they have read or seen on TV or heard other people saying, older people's memories are usually no worse at all"(Coleman,1990a:68).

J.A. Robinson says:

> "There are pragmatic grounds for treating autobiographical memory as distinct: it forms a coherent system of self-referring information..."(1992:223-252).

Again, where some kinds of memory are affected in old age it is difficult to determine whether autobiographical memory is one of them or whether it is an aspect of memory that is relatively unimpaired. Burke writes:

> "Laboratory studies have shown that some aspects of memory performance are unchanged or even improved, while others suffer a decline... Consistent with this, while older adults give lower self-ratings than young adults for their ability to remember proper names and numbers, such as postal codes, young and older adults give equivalent assessments of their memory for factual and personal information, such as experiences in childhood or with friends..." (1992:124-147).

Indeed, in line with symbolic interactionist theory, it may be that general <u>beliefs</u> regarding loss of memory with ageing have tended to result in personal behaviour that

in turn supports and perpetuate such negative beliefs. Indeed, negative beliefs about many aspects of old age have been shown to have a detrimental effect on old people's behaviour. But perhaps in this area of Wales the oral tradition and story-telling pattern might in some way work to counteract these negative beliefs and most people in this study appeared confident of their ability to remember things accurately.

6.5 Values and meaning of life in old age

In any case, the unearthing of memories in an interview context is a collaborative, two-way process between researcher and researched. David Dunaway (1992:42) has written:

> "Often oral historians think of memory and recollection as a near-passive process: the interviewer arrives to mine the vein of recall which is buried in the narrator's distant past. Yet the process is far more collaborative and situational; it takes interviewing and listening skills and a well-digested knowledge base to prompt memory effectively. What explains why one researcher can collect elaborate, detailed testimony from a source, while the other brings home platitudes and rehearsed anecdote? Frustrated interviewers often blame poor memory on the part of the narrator; yet their difficulty may not be recall so much as co-operation and patience."

It is through these tentative, unobtrusive methods of approach that ultimately very rich material can be unearthed, but one must be prepared to go around in circles for a long period of time, if necessary. But, if patient, this method can perhaps reveal glimpses of things which can never be revealed through direct questioning - something like the essence of the meaning old people find in their lives in old age, for example.

Edith's typical day goes as follows:

> "The intensive home care comes three times a day - I can't wash and dress myself... I get up at 7.30. The Home Care's there. She washes and dresses me. I have my breakfast. She washes the dishes. Then she comes. She comes to give me my lunch. I try to do as much of it as I can. But once it's

on cooking I won't touch it. She comes back in the afternoon. Then she comes back about 7 o'clock to undress me."

Emily said:

"Life's the same everyday for me, isn't it.... you get up and you make food and you clear up and that's it."

Bill told me:

"You can't say anything, really, can you? You just go day by day and that's all there is. One day you have a good day, another day you're bad - you're aching here,aching there... then the next day you're alright."

What does this tell us about old people? The importance of ritual, of everything carrying on as it always has; and again the tedium and emptiness at the heart of the loss of social roles - emptiness itself. Minor mishaps can very nearly turn themselves into near tragedy when the mechanism of routine and ritual is disrupted in old age.

Take this experience of Olive's, for instance. She had been planning to go on a W.I. trip to London but was taken ill with the flu. All at once, the fragility beneath the small rituals, the precariousness of the props on which this childless widow relied in her ninetieth year, became apparent.

In a letter to me, she wrote:

"This bitterly cold weather is really getting me down. I was so ill for a fortnight, hardly eating a thing, but I took care to drink plenty. I was alone most of the time because I had stopped my Home Help because I was going to London. After she started back, she did my fire about 9am and shopping and after three quarters of an hour she was gone and I was on my own."

Olive does not say that she feels lonely, forgotten about, uncertain of what each day would hold; she allows herself one metaphor to express her feelings and that is connected with the weather.

Indeed, the issue of values and meaning in old age is a subtext of this whole study. For many old people, meaning in their lives is largely derived from relationships with others. The things of great importance in their lives often depend on the kindness and commitment of others. Vera, for instance, enjoys reading library books but told me:

> "There's a lady in the street who gets them for me. But unfortunately she's in hospital today. So I don't know if there's anybody else who can take them back."

For some, adjustment and modification in long-held values and attitudes had taken place in old age.

Vera made the best of a life which was not outwardly favoured by too many obvious natural or social advantages. Aged 82 and housebound, a spinster and only child, she made use of library books and the telephone to keep in touch with distant friends and relatives, her optimism fed and watered by her faith in The Bible. She was unable to get out to Chapel but had found a way around this that most Chapel-going younger people would not have considered: "No, but the Jehovah Witnesses come here and we read from The Bible," she explained. Elsie, also housebound, occupied herself by writing letters and watching TV and videos of Pavarotti, of whom she was particularly fond (framed photographs of him adorned every wall of her small sitting room). This activity, she claimed, consoled her for the loss of her husband three years previously.

Mary's devotion to housework gave her life a structure and a purpose - the purpose it had always had (the eldest girl in a family of 13, she also spent several years in Service) but with her expectations as to what she could actually achieve with regard to

housework significantly reduced and modified.This is the adjustment and adaptation in values and meaning identified by several anthropologists as highly significant for "successful" ageing (for example Clark and Anderson, 1967; Myerhoff and Simic, 1978)).

But even within the framework of "successful ageing" lies the uncertainty that is an integral part of the experience of old age and which makes inability of old people to look into the future a general phenomenon. Old people often do not wish to plan beyond a day, at the most a week. Stan told me:

> "I was courting my wife just before we left school, you see. Three years ago we celebrated our Golden Wedding Anniversary and I'm hoping that if I live another three years - and you can never tell, can you, life is so uncertain - we'll be able to have our Diamond."

In fact, Stan died before the year was out.

A common perception shared by elderly people is that they have no future - not at least in this world. This inability to conceive of a future has been noted by many other researchers working with old people. Kaufman, for instance, found that the old people she investigated feared losing things which are of value to them now, such as hearing and mental faculties, and so on, but they claim there is nothing to look forward to in life: "The future is not perceived as a source of meaning" (Kaufman, 1986:111).

In this sense, as some old people explicitly told me, they look forward instead to a "future life", conceived of in religious terms. This failure to incorporate a future self in the present experience of their lives manifests itself in small but obvious practical ways. As Lorraine told me,

"What future have I got at my age? Sometimes I think I'd like to have the house done up and then I think: what for? At my time of life!"

6.6 Pet-keeping

Pets may have meaning in some people's lives though not in others. While research (eg Goldmeier,1986) would tend to indicate that pet-keeping enhances the owners' self-concept and decreases feelings of loneliness, there was no consensus in this study on why elderly people chose or did not choose to keep pets. Again, "wanting" a pet is not always translated into "owning" a pet (Mahalski et al, 1988). In fact the mixture of views and circumstances reflects the mixture of views that is found among people of younger generations. Of the two people, both women, who claimed to derive enormous emotional satisfaction from owning pet dogs, one was widowed, fit and active and the other was never-married, housebound and an invalid. Again, two women in similar circumstances, both widowed and childless and in their eighties, displayed very divergent attitudes towards the keeping of pets. One explained that her reason for not having a pet was because she would be unable to go away because she'd not like to give the pet to someone else to look after."I used to have a dog," she said to me, "and when it died I broke my heart." That was over thirty years ago. The other old woman appeared to treat her cats as members of her family. She told me: "I've got no children, see. But I've got two cats" whereupon she described them vividly. She said that when her husband died "even the cat grieved."

6.7 Denial of being old

A common theme among the old people in this study was for them to deny that they themselves were old. They may see other people of their age as old - because they're "not with it", because they let themselves go, by not washing their hair or cooking meals for themselves - but even though they may share the same chronological age, they themselves are not "old" in their own eyes. Who can blame them, with all the negative attributes popularly associated with old age? They themselves have held this negative opinion of old age in their younger days and will not or cannot now willingly admit to partaking of these characteristics themselves. Instead, the majority feel like Menna, who in her eighties, says, "I feel as if I'm 35 or 36. If I could only go and do it. My mind is with it, see." Dai "Butch" appeared to divide people of his own age into those who were old and those who were not. Of the people in the Old Age Home near to his home in Crynant, Dai said, "they're geriatric they are there.. they don't know where they are, there." That was with the exception of one or two men who were "alright" - one aged 94 and the other in his eighties.

Despite being in his eighties himself Dai saw himself as young and so was his friend - "I don't think Bill is old." This is the distinction that Dawson notes in his study when he wrote that people spoke of "good agers and bad agers". He elaborates on this point, stating:

> "The classification does not describe the relative differences in the extent to which individuals have been affected by physical decline, but rather describes positive or negative responses on the part of individuals to the disabling conditions which the rigours of ageing may bring about"(Dawson, 1990:269).

Those who were prepared to categorise themselves as old had usually experienced some severe losses in their lives -usually two or three combined, such as widowhood combined with poor health - and they appeared to have lost their robustness - what Bill identified when he said "they give up fighting." Mainly withdrawn and appearing depressed, these individuals had sustained losses, which they could neither replace, nor could they recover from.

T.S.Eliot wrote:

> "There is a time for building
> And a time for living and for generation
> And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane
> And to shake the wainscot where the fieldmouse trots
> And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto"
> (East Coker I lines 9-13)

and it is perhaps this last stage that the old people who consider themselves to be old have reached, and it is in this sense that we can say "being old" is a state of mind.

In another sense, of course, it is the reactions of others that tell us we are old. Some of the old people, in conversation with me, admitted experiencing shame at being in a wheelchair or at their tendency to fall in public in front of their friends. The stigma, not only of illness, but also of old age itself is something that is experienced daily by many and means that the old woman who lives on her own is often discounted and forgotten by neighbours of a younger generation or turned into an object of ridicule by children in the street who come to ring her bell and run away. This is what Elsie was trying to say when she noted a difference in the nature and quality of the acts children have carried out for years. She said

> "I think people used to do it [ring bells etc] out of wickedness then, but this is a different type of aggravation. They haven't the same respect for people to start with."

What she really felt, perhaps, was the stigma, the piercing sense that these acts,which she had long observed directed at others, were only now being directed at her in a way that drew attention to her difference, as an old person, from the younger element of her neighbourhood.

Stigma separates and divides old people from the rest, in the manner that has been stated by Goffman (1968:12)

> "While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind.... He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one."

Referring to or being referred to as an "old man" or - some would say especially "old woman"- seems to convey this idea of stigma, incorporating a tainted, discounted otherness. This is the reason why these descriptions, when I occasionally heard them used by others to refer to one or other of my informants, so shocked and appalled me, who knew them as individuals and friends and men and women as opposed to old men and old women. And yet, indeed, inevitably such terms were often employed by my informants themselves when describing people of their acquaintance who could be set apart from themselves in some way on account of a couple more years, or illness, or infirmity: "I visit an old lady," said 88 year-old Agnes in describing her 92 year-old neighbour; "I do shopping for an old woman who can't get about" said 80 year-old Ivy. There seemed here to be some sort of pleasure, some eager relishing of the distance that could be played on.

While indicating that they have internalized negative stereotypes about what old age actually is, these comments also reflect the fact that most of my elderly informants did not consider themselves to be old and were deliberately distancing themselves from this state-of-being. One man of 81 who certainly did not see himself as old, was able to generalize this idea comfortably (for generalizations are often comfortable):

> "The span of life today is greater than it was in the 1930s... If you were 65 in the 1930s, you were a real old person. They're living longer today, there are a lot of people dying today over 90 years of age. You live longer and longer today."

In other cases as can be readily observed, local society collectively and unthinkingly marginalises old people by small acts that cut them off from aspects of their ordinary lives. For example, a severe reduction in bus services has occurred in this region and means they are unable to get about to see their friends; the closing down of shops, makes it increasingly difficult for them to carry out necessary routine domestic duties and makes it increasingly difficult for them to perceive themselves as self-sufficient and autonomous.

One old woman bitterly regretted the fact that she was unable to go to church on Sunday mornings any more:

> "We used to have a bus that would take us down. Now we haven't got a bus, there's no buses here on a Sunday. So you can't go anywhere on a Sunday, you can't even go to Church!"

Travelling by bus is difficult in itself and another woman described the difficulties she had encountered when trying to visit her close friend in hospital when the latter suffered a stroke. She explained:

> "I went to see her in hospital - my home help took me in the car and then my cousin from Swansea took me. But otherwise I couldn't go. Its so awkward to get there, you see. You can't get a direct bus there."

Another described her nervousness about bus travelling, which resulted from poor health:

> "In particular since last December because I've been afraid to board the bus because I've been a bit shaky with my left leg, you see. I've been nervous about it, you see."

A sense that one no longer has a place in one's old involvements leads on to the perception of loneliness. Both a symptom and result of the dissolution of these social bonds, it is a widespread phenomenon among the current old generation; indeed it is almost endemic among the old people who discussed their lives with me. In a curious way, one could conceive of loneliness as something which draws old people together and pulls them towards society, while at the same time keeping them on the outer margins:

> "However individualized a man may be, there is always something collective remaining.. He effects communion through sadness when he no longer has anything else with which to achieve it" (Durkheim, 1952:214).

There is an image, out of the multitude of images thrown up in the course of this study, which hauntingly embodies this idea. It is the image of a wheelchair-bound woman, confined to her second floor flat, wishing that she could see more from her window than the tops of trees, hoping instead that she would see somebody, some other human being, walking by.

That is why old people are keen to dissociate themselves from the state of being-old, and this also explains why some old people were not willing to go to old people's clubs or daycentres, which also attract to themselves negative stereotypes. Mrs T- was distancing herself from this when she insisted that the reason she was attending the Glynneath daycentre was as a helper to her sister-in-law.

Religion and religious beliefs add an important dimension to the experience of being old. Much of the meaning their lives have to them is conceived in religious imagery which elevates their experience of ill health, loneliness, bereavement into something containing a higher purpose. Jack, in describing his struggle with ill health, doesn't just fight; he says he "fights the good fight". Many other old people explain away the otherwise unaccountable difficulties they are currently experiencing by making reference to "God's plan."

The strong, religious orientation is something which is both peculiar to the elderly generation and is also predictable for a generation that had been raised at a time when the Chapel and Church's influence was still notable, even though, by the time of the first decade of the twentieth century, the influence of trade unionism and politics was competing with this.

In Onllwyn, in the Dulais Valley, Gwyn Evans' figures (1961) showed that between 1900 and 1930 chapel membership continued to grow and attendances at services remained high; its real decline came in the two decades between 1930 and 1950. Nevertheless for most of the old people in this study, in particular the women, the church provided a social centre and gave an order and structure to their leisure time - through prayer meetings, Bible study, Sisterhood, the choir, W.I. Historical decline in the chapel and church in Wales is well documented, but studies (eg Koenig et al, 1988) have identified a connection between religious beliefs and old age. One hypothesis is that as people grow old, their personal resources become less abundant and self-perceived control over situations and life may lessen - so in this sense religious beliefs might offer support.

6.8 Bereavement

The frequency of the experience of bereavement in the lives of old people also serves to remind old people of their own mortality and may cause them to dwell on the possibility of an after-life. Various kinds of bereavement occur in old age. The death of the spouse is the most significant kind of bereavement and is an event experienced particularly by women. The death of the last parent - usually the mother - often occurs in early-old age for people of this generation, which again constitutes a significant blow for individuals in a "mam-centred" culture -where mothers possess a powerful and lifelong influence over their families. Occasionally, particularly in old-old age, the death of a child occurs, but this is rare and I encountered only two cases among the old people I befriended. Death of siblings and friends is commonplace. With the death of a significant other in a closeknit society such as this a part of one's identity is lost too - the roles of daughter, wife, best friend, are lost irreplaceably. For old people in this society, death is yet another - the final - stage in the process in which they have seen their communities and their social worlds - concepts which strongly overlap - disintegrate. Ultimately, although this occurred to very few people in this study, one can reach a situation in advanced old age in which everyone who once knew you has died and left you at the top of a sort of pyramid of interconnecting lives - a pinnacle of loneliness.

6.9 The country of old age

> "It is clear that the people I worked with are dealing with two distinct notions of community; one of the present, and one "apparently" of the past. This latter community is essentially "theirs". In other words, they are the members of this community, the generational survivors of its era, and the guardians of its values. It is in this sense that I refer to community as "apparently" of the past, for, I would argue, it is a community which is still existent in the gatherings of the elderly" (Dawson, 1990:168).

The point I have been trying to make in this study is that the old people inhabit a "country of old age" which consists of certain values, practices, interconnections and memories. They are proud of this country and they are indeed its survivors, for to have reached an old and articulate age from such difficult beginnings is in itself a special achievement.

They are proud of who they are and that is perhaps why most people who took part in this study did not wish to be referred to anonymously here. Indeed, although I offered my informants anonymity, none wished to avail themselves of it, opting instead to claim ownership of their stories. The idea that I intended to write a "book" based on their "lives" both pleased and impressed them, helping to maintain their interest and enthusiasm. Nevertheless, not wishing to take inappropriate advantage of such enthusiasm, I compromise here by referring to them only by their first names, or if they introduced themselves to me using their married names or surnames, then a shortened form of that - Mr X-, or Mrs Y-. I have struck a balance also in my descriptions of them such that in all probability they would most likely recognise themselves while others would be far less certain in their identification. Indeed, it is not particularly surprising that they should not wish for anonymity and it has been observed by contemporary sociologists that "ordinary" people enjoy owning up to their own statements:

> "... they ask why we promise anonymity to the people whose life histories we record. Instead, they say, why not promise to name them? After all, as Chesnaux put it, we academics "set great store by name", as in the phrase "to make a name for oneself"" (McCall and Wittner, 1990:73).

NOTES

1. It is perhaps interesting that while articles abound offering advice to researchers about how to elicit delicate information from their subjects, there is strangely an almost entire absence of guides proffering advice to the researcher on how to overcome a sense of restraint and taboo within <u>themselves.</u>

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APPENDIX

List of Key Informants

AGNES: born in 1902, Seven Sisters. Lives: Seven Sisters. Widow of a miner. Mother and grandmother.

OLIVE: born in 1904, Aberdare. Moved to Glynneath as a child. Currently living Glynneath (family home). Widow of policeman. Childless.

JACK: born in 1906, Aberavon. Currently living in Port Talbot. Retired steelworker. Widower. Father and great grandfather.

DANIEL JOHN: born in 1908 Ynysmeudwy. Currently living in Pontardawe. Retired tinworker. Widower. Father and grandfather.

DAI "BUTCH": born in 1908, Seven Sisters. Currently living in Crynant. Retired miner. Widower, father and great-grandfather.

MARY R-: born in 1908, Aberdare. Moved to Resolven as a child where she currently lives (family house). Daughter of miner. Did "service" for many years. Spinster.

PHYLLIS: born in Resolven, 1909. Currently lives in same house in Resolven. Daughter of miner.Spinster.

VERA: born 1910, Cwmgwrach. Currently lives in Cwmgwrach (same house). Daughter of miner. Spinster.

KATIE: born Glynneath 1913. Daughter and widow (twice over) of miners. Currently living in Dyffryn Cellwen. Mother and grandmother.

ELSIE: born in Resolven, 1922. Currently living in Resolven (family house). Widow of miner. Mother and grandmother.